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EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Thesis/Project

EPISCOPAL FEMALE CLERGY LEADERS OF AFRICAN HERITAGE:
TRAILBLAZERS AND COLLEAGUES

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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To my parents, Dr. Oliver and Dorothy Coleman, for their love and wise guidance.

To My Trailblazers:

Christine Coleman
Betty Johnson
LeClair Knox
Eunice Lowery
Jessie Stewart

My loving husband Jamie.

Acknowledgement

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Preface

“Episcopal Female Clergy Leaders of African Heritage, Trailblazers and Colleagues” is a two part work focused on two groups of women and their stories, spiritual formation, ministry and struggles. The first part consists of interviews with five of the first eleven African American women ordained as priests in the Episcopal Church. The second section looks at the ministry of some of my colleagues, whose paths I have crossed during our ministry, who have or are working in all or predominately white parishes. I have placed an asterisk by the names of women whom I have interviewed.

First Eleven African-American Women Ordained in the Episcopal Church

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, January 1977 (Deceased)
The Rev. Mary Adebonojo, April 1980*
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Barbara C. Harris, October 1982*
The Rev. Michele Thornton, December 1981.
The Rev. Dr. Sandra (Sandye) A. Wilson, January 1982*
The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, February 1982*
The Rev. Norma Blackwell, January 1983
The Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown-Douglas, September 1983
Dr. Ann Holmes Redding, March 1984¹
The Rev. Alcena Boozer, June 1984
The Rev. Canon. Nan Arrington Peete, February 1985*

My selection of colleagues for part two are:

The Rev. Jennifer Baskerville Burrows, February 1998
The Rev. Monique Ellson, June 2002
The Rev. Cheryl Parris, September 2003
The Rev. Mpho Tutu, January 2004
The Rev. Paula Clark Green, January 2005
The Rev. Anne-Marie Jeffery, January 2005

¹ Dr. Holmes-Redding was deposed on April 1, 2009

The reason for my particular selections was based on women that I have met during my time as a seminarian and as a priest. These women have served as mentors, confidants, guides and prayer partners along my journey toward ordained ministry, after ordination and today. Even Pauli Murray, who I never had the opportunity of meeting, provided me with the opportunity to walk with her through her letters, writings and sermons. The only stories that have been previously published are those of the late Rev. Pauli Murray², Bishop Barbara Harris³ and Canon Nan Peete's have been the only stories told in print. All the clergywomen included here have told me how they supported each other in seminary, at their ordinations and how they continue to be part of each others lives.

I was able to put together a chronological list after speaking with some of the early women priests and cross-referencing the names they provided and their respective ordination dates that were found in Louis Crew's "Directory of Black Clergy."³ Much of the material that has been written about the early ordination of women in the Episcopal Church has aroused my curiosity since my own matriculation as an Masters of Divinity student at Episcopal Divinity School. My time as an MDiv student allowed me the opportunity to have conversations with the Rev. Dr. Carter Heywood, in regards to her experience as one of the first eleven irregularly ordained women priests. My early time at EDS and my subsequent work experience has fostered into an interest in explaining the evolution of women in the priesthood.

² Pauli Murray's papers are housed in the Schlesinger Library, at Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Studies, Cambridge MA.

³ www.rci.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/blackclergy.html (accessed September 10, 2009).

The questions uppermost in my mind were: “What was it like crashing up against a glass ceiling? Where did you find support in your Herculean effort? What were some of the major stumbling blocks as a local priest and on your journey to Bishop? What was your spiritual journey that led you to your call to the ordained priesthood?” Concerns of utmost importance to me were:

- The location of landmines along the road to becoming a priest
- The degree of sexism, racism and other ism’s within the Episcopal hierarchy as well as within parishes both black and white
- Words of wisdom to other ordained women of African heritage

Information gleaned from the interviews that was not relevant to my inquiry or too personal to be cited here has not been included in this thesis.

I wanted to compare the stories of the trailblazers with those joys and difficulties my contemporaries are still facing. I wanted to look at my contemporaries as also being trailblazers serving in white and predominately white parishes. Where and how did contemporaries and trailblazers intersect in God’s call to the ministry? For these early women are the ones at whose feet we sit at, listening intently while they share stories of joy, laughter, heartbreak and frustration, always knowing of God’s presence in their work for ministry.

The selection of my contemporaries as a major source of information came out of my wonderful experience working in an all-white parish, and having only one person that I knew who was sharing a similar experience at the time. My contemporaries may have met once or twice at the conference for black seminarians hosted by the national church,

we may have corresponded occasionally by e-mail, but several of us lost touch with each other after ordination and others were not included in the conferences. I found my contemporaries by word of mouth and through networking among priests. I now consider these women I interacted with in the development of this thesis a circle of supportive priests. All are pursuing a common interest in the moral theology of faith as the church works through issues of civil rights, women's rights and liturgical reform.

The questions asked of all respondents were identical, to look at the differences and the similarities over a span of twenty years. To see where these women's support comes from and who were their allies. To look at trends in recruitment and deployment of women of African heritage. To look at the prayerful places that keep them grounded and to share stories of their life and struggles in ministry. My contemporaries for this study came from a variety of backgrounds. They are single, married, married with children, African American, South African, and Caribbean, gay and straight. The women interviewed are all living on the eastern seaboard. I am cognizant that women in different geographical regions may have had different experiences. Nonetheless, within the constraints of space and focus in this thesis I wanted to adequately represent the diversity of our faces in the Episcopal Church.⁴

I believe the topic of this study is significant for it documents a growing disparagement of women clergy and the way that they are still viewed in the 21st century,

⁴ Black female priests are 18.2% of all the black priests, yet the 24 black female priests constitute 12.8% of all black priests in charge of ECUSA congregations in the 100 domestic dioceses. Males are 87.2% of all black priests in charge. Louie Crew "Black Priests in the Episcopal Church, 2002,www.rci.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/blkpr.html. (accessed September 10, 2009).

particularly women of African heritage. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in Episcopal white churches and to a large measure in black Episcopal churches. While there is still work to be done on the anti-racism, anti-oppression fronts, the women contacted for this study have overcome many previous obstacles confronting them in the church to become agents of change. At the conclusion of the thesis I provide some suggestions and present a list of questions and two exercises on how the results and information of this study can be useful in an anti-racism, anti-oppression workshop on a diocesan level, or to broaden the horizons of congregations to look beyond skin color and gender in their search for a new rector.

The stories of the women's experiences gleaned for this work have grounded me in my own African spiritual history and development. I have learned of the intersecting relationships that have supported and connected our lives together. I know that I am held up and supported by the women and men of all races who have not only gone before me, but who walk with me to this day. I know that I am held in a circle of love, protection, and prayer. Our connected stories will grow and continue with God's help.

Episcopal Female Clergy Leaders of African Heritage, Trailblazers and Colleagues

Introduction

“Friends and countrymen!
I speak for my race and for my people!
The human race and just people.
— Pauli Murray¹

I remember attending nursery school at the Merrill-Palmer Institute for Child Development in Detroit, Michigan. I had been one of three African American students accepted for pre-school that year. I attended a racially mixed elementary school but was only one of three African American youth in junior high school. I graduated from Detroit's premier Cass Technical High School, renowned for its rigorous college bound curriculum.

At the University of Michigan I majored in Art History, where my friend John Hunter, a doctoral student and I were the only people of color. My first job out of college was serving as an art appraiser trainer and later as an art appraiser at Sotheby's in New York City. My love of art coupled with outstanding mentors in the world of art launched my fundraising career with arts organizations. From there I moved on to continue my fundraising career with Girl Scouts of the USA, The American Cancer Society and East Stroudsburg University. The constant throughout was I was typically the only person of color. So blazing new trails has become a way of life for me.

¹ Pauli Murray, *Dark Testament and Other Poems* (Norwalk: Silvermine Publishers Inc.1970).

I come from a long line of trailblazers; my mother was the first “colored” pharmacist at Hudson’s Department Store in Detroit. My mother obtained her job position through the help of a close family friend, Dr. Francis A. Kornegay, who was then serving as President of the Detroit Urban League. My father was the first one in his family to attend college rising subsequently through the ranks of teacher, counselor, principal, school superintendent and college professor. As the fourth generation to attend college on my mother’s side, stories were shared by my grandmother, grandfather and great uncle about the racial discrimination on university campuses.

My journey into “Episcopal Women of African Heritage: Trailblazers and Colleagues”, begins in the spring of 2003 with an innocent enough conversation at the offices of The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. The Rt. Rev. Roy Cederholm, known as “Bishop Bud”, was getting on the elevator and said, “Call Skip Windsor in Needham, he’s looking for an assistant.” I had known Rev. Robert Windsor (Skip) during my time at Episcopal Divinity School, where he served on the Congregational Studies Committee, when I was working for The Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kujawa. As the rector of Christ Church, Needham, Skip had an excellent reputation for being one of the good guys and a solid mentor. I was excited to be presented with this opportunity.

Christ Church in Needham, is a suburban parish located 12 miles west of Boston. It is surrounded by its wealthy neighbors of Wellesley, Dover and Newton. It would be described as a relatively affluent community, and predominately white.

I knew nothing about the church or the town of Needham, except that Bishop Bud had been the former rector. After a meeting with Skip, I attended a Sunday service to get

a feel for the parish. The call to the church became apparent to me a few weeks later when a Christ Church parishioner passed away and I was invited to attend the service. Mr. Bob Bell, the widower, spoke to me at the collation after the service, gave me a hug and said, “We’re going to love having you, it’s a great place.” I began my position as Curate at Christ Church, Needham on August 1, 2003 and was ordained to the priesthood in September 11th of that same year.

The three years spent at Christ Church were powerful times of spiritual and priestly development. I believe that we grow into our priesthood and that God works through us and through other people to nurture and develop that spiritual growth. I recall my first pastoral home visit, when accompanied by Mrs. Fran Kurker, a member of the parish care group introduced me to Mrs. Thelma Drake. In short, I was nervous. Thelma, who was white, was a long time parishioner at the church. She ran the nursery school, taught Sunday school, and worked in the thrift shop. You name it, Thelma had a part in it. Thelma, had a presence about her. I could not help feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in our conversations. I had had some memorable home appraisal experiences during my time as an art appraiser for Sotheby’s in New York because of my race. In a few instances potential clients were surprised when the appraiser arriving to give estimates was African American. I wasn’t sure how elderly parishioners would react to an African American female being their priest. From that day on until the day she died, Thelma became a person I not only pastored to but who also person who provided guidance to me.

I believe it takes a priest secure in themselves and in their priesthood to mentor the newly ordained. Skip provided that guidance that I needed during those early years of ordained ministry. The door was always open for discussion of our views or a variety of church matters. I discovered that as a parish priest you must be engaged in the personal and spiritual lives of your parishioners. Conversations that would not have taken place in any of my solicitation visits or calls as a former fundraiser were now taking place on a very personal and spiritual level.

My interests in ordained women of African heritage grew out of the lectures I heard from Dr. Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kujawa Holbrook, Dr. Katie G. Canon, Rev. Dr. Joan Martin and Rev. Kelly Brown-Douglas to name a few noted scholars. I found that most articles and books on the subject were written from the perspective of African American women serving in the Black Church or dealt with the subject of womanist interpretations of the bible. It was more difficult to find material that related to my particular ministry. Nowhere could I find any material regarding African American women working in all-white parish settings. I found myself missing the opportunity to connect with other women who were sharing the same experiences. Outside the supportive walls of Christ Church I had become somewhat of an outcast among some of my brothers and sisters of color and could not find a place of entry or support from the National Church's Office of Black Ministries. Some of the statements echoed from my colleagues of color were, "How'd YOU get that job?" or "Selling out to the white church, heh." or "Still at the man's church." "When are you coming back to your people." "Who did you know to get that job." All such expressions I found very

disconcerting. The Office of Black Ministries Conferences provided plenty of conferences and workshops for clergy serving the black church. The Office provided no workshops, mentoring or any other support mechanisms for the clergy of African heritage who were not serving the black church. I might add a note here to say that I received no employment offers, inquiries or mentoring from the African American male clergy, either in the Diocese of Newark or in the Diocese of Massachusetts when I was first ordained.

I thought somewhere in the corpus of womanist theological studies someone must already have written about this topic. I also thought that there must be other female clergy of African heritage elsewhere who would like to share in this particular conversation. I believe we are slowly entering into a new time in the Episcopal Church and in the whole society about how we relate to each other. This change is signaled by changes in the attitudes of bishops, deployment officers and search committees who might have maintained the notion that women of African heritage are to be deployed to black churches. We are now moving into a place where the ministry of women of African heritage is valued in a variety of parish settings.

I also began to look differently at who I understood my Jesus to be, my Christology and my theology. My views had to expanded beyond pedagogy of the oppressed into something transformative and liberating. Prior to her death the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray envisioned writing a volume of work addressing her life within the Episcopal Church. Pauli's theology was based on the betterment of humanity working through the church to serve this end. She recalls in her writings:

“All the strands of my life had come together. Now I was empowered to minister the sacrament of One in whom there is no north or south,

no black or white, no male or female –only the spirit of love and reconciliation drawing us all toward the goal of human wholeness”²

I cannot enter into my own story without personal reflection and story telling of my background. Neither can I enter into the story about the first African American women ordained in the Episcopal Church without referring to two of the more notable books regarding people of African heritage and the Episcopal Church.

In 1922, The Rev. Dr. George Freeman Bragg wrote *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church*. In the introduction written by The Rt. Rev. Theodore DuBose Bratton, Bishop of Mississippi, Bratton praises Bragg for the “love of his church and his people.”³ He goes on to say, “The book is the story of the Church of the Incarnation in American Negro Life, and of its fruits, an entrancingly interesting story to every Churchman who loves to watch what the Lord God is doing among the sons of men.”⁴ It also should be noted however, that the stories of women laity are absent from Bragg’s work.

It would be another 65 years before The Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis would pick up the mantle again in his book, *Yet, with a Steady Beat: The African American Struggle for Recognition in the Episcopal Church* which he dedicates to Rev. Bragg.. Lewis’s history brings one up to date in terms of the recent African American history in the Episcopal Church. However, he writes nothing about the work of Black ordained women in the church. Bishop Barbara Harris notes “...the significant contributions of lay people,

² Pauli Murray, box 45, folder 806 Pauli Murray, Pauli Murray Papers, box 45, folder 806. Pauli Murray Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliff College, Cambridge, MA.

³ George F. Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Baltimore, Church Advocate Press, 1922), 27.

⁴ Ibid, 28.

especially lay women, were not given more prominence in both the historical section as well as the contemporary analysis.”⁵

Our history as ordained women of African heritage in the Episcopal Church has been virtually ignored in writing by the church. Histories, and documents have been kept in church records, personal collections and oral histories. The notable exceptions include materials about the life and ordination of Pauli Murray in 1977, and the consecration of Barbara C. Harris as the first woman and black women bishop in 1989. An article “Different Voices” written by Marjorie Nichols Farmer, can be found in the collection edited by Catherine Prelinger *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination*. The article written in 1992 gives a brief synopsis of the history of ordained women of African heritage. Otherwise the stories of our ordained sisters are a part of what is known as “the invisible church.”⁶

What we bring to the table as ordained women of African heritage is our heritage, our ancestors, and a different social history. It does not represent one social heritage but a variety of voices: we are southern rooted, northern rooted, African American, Afro-Caribbean, African, single, married, divorced, straight, lesbian, young, middle aged and graceful in our maturity. What we all have witnessed is the history of institutional racism in our beloved Episcopal Church, but we have all witnessed also the transformative nature of God as God calls us to witness in our ministry.

⁵ Quoted in “A compendium of Reactions to: Yet with a Steady Beat: The African American Struggle for Recognition in The Episcopal Church by Harold T. Lewis. Irene V. Brown, ed, Spring 1996 Supplement, *Linkage*, 14.

⁶ Marjorie Nicols Farmer. *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination*, ed. Catherine Prelinger (New York: Oxford, 1992) 222.

Our story as Episcopal women of the cloth is rooted in those who came before us to make our ordination a reality. *If it Wasn't for the Women* is the name of a book written by Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, who says, “Black women community activists and churchwomen have a deep sense of their indispensability to the organizations and institutions in which they participate.”⁷ We have always served in leadership roles in the church and done much of the work behind the scenes. Quite naturally the question is raised: Why is it so difficult to be able to see us on the altars of white and multi-racial churches?

In 1974, two years before the National Church voted to make the ordination of women to the priesthood canonically possible, The Rev. Paul Washington⁸, rector of Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, allowed for the “irregular ordination” of eleven women in his parish. Washington would later recall in his book, *Other Sheep I Have*, “After the event I had time to stop and realize what I had gotten myself into. In obeying God in heaven, I had disobeyed the principal powers of the church.”⁹ Washington went on to recall another reflection after his admonishment from Bishop Ogilby.¹⁰ “Along with the yoke of Christ, like the cross, we are to expect suffering, but how beautiful and fulfilling it is to endure a suffering that is life-giving and redemptive.”¹¹ It would be another two years before the national church voted to make the ordination of women to the priesthood canonically possible.

⁷ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “*If it Wasn't for the Women*” (New York, Orbis, 2001), 4.

⁸ Rev. Washington was an early champion of women’s ordination.

⁹ The Rev Paul Washington, *Other Sheep I Have* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1994), 171.

¹⁰ Bishop Lyman Ogilby, Bishop, Diocese of Pennsylvania.

¹¹ Ibid, 172.

In 1981, when Bishop Barbara was asked at the Black Women's Task Force at the Third National Conference of Episcopal Church Task Force on Women, how does the black women's agenda differ from that their white sisters, she responded:

We have a parenting function and responsibility, a pastoral care function and responsibility, and [a responsibility for] the preaching the good news to the poor, in tangible forms. But we came at it with different priorities, born out of different needs and different experiences.¹²

In recent years ordained women of African heritage have begun to move out of the black church, into churches of racial and ethnic diversity, and most recently into all-white parish settings. We have found that while we could come together around the table in some places it still mattered that a man set the table. Old ways of thinking of the minister being the male head of the church and a pastor to the community still mattered, not only to the congregation but to the male clergy themselves. Pauli Murray notes in her letters that two African American bishops, The Rt. Rev John Walker¹³ and The Rt. Rev John Burgess¹⁴ were not early supporters of women's ordination. They both later changed their minds. Pauli's wonderful quote from one of her unsent letters to Bishop Walker ends with; "God made me as I am, are you a Bishop of the Church, questioning God's handiwork?" traditional thinking still occupies the altars of some of some parishes, the doors have been gradually been opened to receive female priests of African heritage. We have and continue to break down glass ceiling and other barriers to our ordained

¹² Farmer, 225

¹³ The Rt. Rev. John T. Walker (1925-1989) served as the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington from 1977-1989.

¹⁴ The Rt. Rev. John Burgess (1909-2003) served as Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts from 1962-1970. In 1970, he was elected Diocesan Bishop and served until 1975. Burgess was the first African-American elected to the position of a Diocesan.

leadership. We have and continue to join together to pray for and support other female priest of African heritage whether we know them by name or not.

The first section is mostly based on my interviews from four of the first eleven African American women ordained in the Episcopal Church. Information regarding the ministry of Pauli Murray came from her papers housed at the Schlesinger Library. The next set of stories consists of interviews from my colleagues in ministry. These women have worked in white and predominately white parishes. In the section “Threads” I look at the similarities and differences in ministries and experiences that span the course of 20 years in ministry. The conclusion is a witness on the importance of these missing stories in the life of The Episcopal Church (TEC). The appendix provides educational models and questions to be used by search committees, deployment officers and bishops in raising up the ordained leadership of women of African heritage.

I invite you as you are reading this thesis to see how your lives have possibly intersected with any of the women interviewed. Share with them, laugh with them, cry with them and freely share the stories that have been so freely presented here with others. Let us begin through our shared experience to continue to open the doors for those who will come after us.

CHAPTER I: TRAILBLAZERS

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray

Color Trouble

If you dislike me just because
my face has more of Sun than yours,
then, when you see me, turn and run
but do not try to bar the sun.

February 1938¹⁵

This chapter contains two stories of five of the first eleven African American women ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church are chronicled. These and stories that chronicle spiritual journeys, experiences and words of support and encouragement to those women who have followed in their footsteps.

Pauli Murray (Anna Pauline Murray) was born in Baltimore, Maryland on November 20, 1910. Her mother, a nurse, died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of thirty-five, when Pauli was only three years old.¹⁶ Because of her father's inability to care for all six of the Murray children, Pauli was raised by her Aunt Pauline in Durham, North Carolina. Living with her aunt, a school teacher, Murray knew well the drive for educational excellence and church activity, because the classroom and church were "a natural extension of my home life when I was growing up."¹⁷ Pauli maintained this

¹⁵ Pauli Murray, *Dark Testament and other Poems*, (Norwalk, Conn. Silvermine, 1970), 30.

¹⁶ Murray reflects on her mother's death in "Problem Child" Pauli Murray Papers, box 84, folder 1547.

¹⁷ Pauli Murray, *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 48; originally published as *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

commitment to education throughout her studies beginning in 1928 at Hunter College in New York City.

After completing her bachelor's degree, Pauli worked with social-service oriented agencies, most notably as a field secretary with the Worker's Defense League. In 1940 while working for the League she came in contact with Odell Waller, a man sentenced to die for murdering the owner of the land he sharecropped. As a result of Waller's execution, Pauli decided to attend law school to help eradicate legalized racism, a system of injustice that claimed countless victims like Waller.¹⁸ She enrolled at Howard University Law School in 1941, where she encountered some of the greatest civil rights scholars of her era. With their help, she began to develop and hone her legal skills and her acute awareness of and sensitivity to civil rights issues. Because of the civil rights emphasis of the school, Pauli spent a great deal of time discussing segregation and the law, which often indirectly affected later arguments of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

She was directly involved in providing legal council for a group of Howard women in January 1943 for refusing to pay a tax (applied to purchases made by black customers) on cups of hot chocolate. This outrage sparked action as students organized a civil rights committee, with the support of the NAACP. They used their educational background in law, and tools such as the "stool sitting technique," to fight for equal

¹⁸ Pauli also had an interest in creative writing. She often corresponded with the poet Stephen V. Benet to gain critical comments concerning her poetry. Although Benet recognized genuine talent in her poetry, he advised her not to depend on poetry for a living. This contributed to her decision to pursue law. *Dark Testament and Other Poems* (Norwalk, Conn.: Silvermine, 1970) contains poetry written by Pauli from 1933 to 1941.

accommodations in Washington, D.C. in 1943-44.¹⁹ Pauli's commitment to integration later resulted in an arrest while traveling to North Carolina for failure to obey Jim Crow transporting regulations.²⁰ Her interest in nonviolent direct action also implied an understanding of the manner in which physical aggression eats away at the essential self of aggressors and victims. It is evident that she had begun wrestling with the demands of justice and the manner in which one's life or ultimate orientation must correspond with one's definition of justice.

Pauli graduated from Howard Law School in 1944 and was ranked number one in her class. Based on her achievements at Howard, she applied to Harvard Law School but was rejected because of her gender. She practiced law in her own office and later as an associate in Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison, one of New York City's large private firms. In her autobiography, Pauli recounts the awkwardness and loneliness of being the oldest entry-level attorney, the only African-American, and the only woman practicing law in the firm. It was during this time that she would meet her life-long partner, Irene Barlow, who was working as an executive secretary at the firm.

Pauli, while growing restless at the firm, began to take an interest in the emerging movements for African independence. She decided to pursue this interest by accepting a post at a law school being developed in Ghana between 1960 and 1962. This time in Ghana also gave her an opportunity to explore her own racial identity and to reflect on

¹⁹ Murray, Murray Papers, box 84, folder 1457.

²⁰ For an account of this incident, see Pauli's interview with Robert Martin on August 15 and 17, 1968, for the Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection, found in the Murray Papers, box 1, and folder 8.

the race problem in the United States.²¹ After much discernment Pauli returned to the United States and earned a S.J.D. from Yale.²² With degree in hand, Pauli would hold many positions and appointments, including vice president and professor of political science at Benedict College in South Carolina, and as a member of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. In addition, she was an important figure in the development of the National Organization of Women.

The 1960's were turbulent times, especially on college campuses. It was Morris Abram, the newly selected President at Brandeis University in New York City, who recruited Pauli to accept a position in the department of American Studies with encouragement to develop legal studies courses appropriate for the department.

Pauli's approach to activism did not prepare her for the turmoil present on the Brandeis campus. She hoped to foster a version of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "beloved community" but quickly found that this vision was not in keeping with the demands of the Brandeis students. She recognized that experience and perspective separated her from African American students on campus:

Those forty years of intense personal history separated me from the young black students and gave me a somewhat different perspective on the ubiquitous racial dilemma which now tore at their vitals.²³

Pauli would not overlook the sexism of the Black Power movement; her feminist perspective did not allow for this. Yet at the same time she appreciated the movement's

²¹ In Ghana, Pauli grew restless to return to the states as chronicled in the letters to her dear friend Caroline Ware. Thaddeus M. Davis & Linda K. Kerber eds., *Pauli Murray & Caroline Ware, forty years of letters in black & white* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²² S.J.D., Doctor of Judicial Science. This terminal degree in law was then offered by a distinct minority of law schools.

²³ Murray, Pauli Murray, 390.

attempt to develop an identity that restored pride and celebrated the rich cultural heritage of African Americans.

Pauli gave credit to Eleanor Roosevelt and to King as the inspiration for bringing together issues of racism and sexism. She also remarked that reflecting on these figures pointed out the importance of the Christian tradition as a source of empowerment. She believed that at the core of the human crisis was a moral and spiritual question to be addressed by thoughtful people. However, her years of involvement with the Episcopal Church forced recognition of the problems within the Christian tradition, problems she could not ignore. Her involvement on the Special Commission on Ordained and Licensed Ministries, combined with her contacts at the Episcopal Divinity School, sensitized her to the sexism in the church; and in keeping with her commitment to justice, she vowed to leave the church before bowing to that sexism: “I had been taught all my life to revere the church and its teachings; now I could only condemn the church as sinful when it denied me the right to participate as fully and freely in the worship of God as my brethren. If the present church customs were justified, then I did not belong in the church and it became a stumbling block to faith.”²⁴ Eventually, in protest, she left the church, only to return with a renewed commitment to foster change through personal example. Over several years, the struggle for women’s full inclusion in lay activities grew to include a quest for the priesthood for women.

The death of Pauli’s life partner, Irene, forced a reevaluation of her participation in the life of the church. As a layperson within the church she had been unable to provide

²⁴ Ibid, 370.

for Irene's spiritual needs by administering last rites. This realization, combined with a reflection of her personal priorities, resulted in Pauli's moving toward ordained ministry. Questions of community and morality were not new to Pauli; she had faced these continuously both as a child and as an adult. This reality, combined with her strong spirituality, required consolidation in a way easily provided by the priesthood. However, some suggest that Pauli's long history as a caregiver speaks to an early interest in ministry. Suzanne Hiatt notes, "When the issue of women in the priesthood came up, old dreams and a new fight began to stir in her."²⁵

Regardless of what ultimately moved her, she resigned her position at Brandeis in 1973, one year after receiving tenure, and decided to bring together formally her religiosity and her work toward justice through ministry in the Episcopal Church.

Pauli began her studies at General Theological Seminary in New York City with the ultimate goal of becoming an Episcopal priest. The value of ordination for her was that it would facilitate a more complex set of tools for the betterment of life in the United States through praxis on behalf of humanity.²⁶ This general care for humanity was more than an internally derived imperative; it became, through call to ministry, an overt and institutionally recognized obligation:

Pauli was sponsored for ordination by Emmanuel Church, Newbury Street, in Boston. The Rt. Rev. John Burgess, not an immediate supporter of woman's ordination, allowed her to be ordained in Washington, D.C. She was ordained to the priesthood in

²⁵ Suzanne R. Hiatt. "Pauli Murray: May Her Song Be heard at Last" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4 (Fall 1988): 69-73. The Rev. Dr. Suzanne Radley Hiatt, September 11, 1936 – May 30, 2002 was one of the first eleven women ordained to the priesthood in Philadelphia.

²⁶ Murray, Murray Papers, box 45, folder 86.

January of 1977. She would spend the remainder of her life pastoring two churches, the Church of the Atonement in Washington, D.C. and the Church of the Holy Nativity in Baltimore. She also spent a good deal of time on the road as a visiting priest. She attended the ordinations of Mary Adebonojo, Barbara Harris and Sandye Wilson.

Pauli knew that feminist theology was not free from flaws. She knew that the one danger present in feminist thought is its tendency to isolate sexism as the only notable form of oppression. Pauli preferred to speak of cooperation or relationships between racist and sexist behavior.

Black theology had also had a difficult time maintaining a balance between issues of racism and other forms of oppression. From Pauli's perspective, black theology places so much emphasis on black collective reality and the particular (as opposed to the universal) that its analysis does not extend beyond racial groups to the merit of individual effort and responsibility. I believe that Pauli was correct in identifying this as a harmful oversight that downplays individual acts of tenacity and the place of individual commitment in the achievement of societal equity. Pauli was rightfully disturbed by the manner in which the progress of black men often means the destruction of essential characteristics in black women – a sense of independence, forthrightness, moral toughness, optimism.

The social analysis offered by feminists such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Letty Russell, as well as the work of theologian J. DeOtis Roberts, proved to be very useful to Pauli. She found the emphasis on reconciliation within Robert's

work inspiring, because it enhanced movement beyond discord and isolation, toward the emergence of a unified human family.²⁷

Pauli understood that both feminist and black theologies spoke to a need for humanization and an understanding of the oppressed as subjects of history with whom God identifies. Although they were both vital movements towards religious and social betterment, neither spoke to the experiences of African American women who suffered because of their race, gender, and class. Black male theologians approached “women’s issues” with suspicion, and feminists held a rather provincial conception of the community of women. Keeping this narrow agenda, both feminists and black theologians ignored the uniqueness of black women. According to Pauli:

Negro women have tremendous power. How shall they use their power? How can they help Negro men and themselves to achieve mature relationships in the wider community without impairing this tradition? Or is it inherent in the struggle that Negro men can achieve maturity only at the price of destroying in Negro women the very characteristics which are stressed as part of the American tradition and which have been indispensable to the Negro’s steep climb out of slavery? And if these qualities are suppressed in the women, what will be the effect upon the personalities of future generations of Negro children?²⁸

Pauli proposed a theology of relationship that was pro-black, pro-woman and concerned with the dangers of particularization.²⁹ Emilie Townes speaks of womanist spirituality as rooted in the striving of earlier black women, and the strength of this connection holds, I believe, for Pauli as well.

²⁷ Murray, Murray Papers, box 99, folder 1776.

²⁸ Ibid, box 84, folder 1458.

²⁹ Ibid, box 23, folder 475.

African American women began with an intense personal experience of the divine in their lives and took that call to salvation into the public realm to reform a corrupt moral order. Their spirituality, which at first viewing resembles a self-centered piety with little relation to the larger context, is an excellent example of the linking of personal and societal transformation....¹²⁰These women sought perfection and advocated social reforms in the framework of a spirituality that valued life and took seriously the responsibility to help create and maintain a just and moral social order.³⁰

Pauli's theological reflection highlighted areas that would later be explored by womanist theologians. Her sense of personal defiance and her life mirror, I believe, are the essence of Alice Walker's definition of womanish.³¹ Pauli's intellectual insights into the omission of black women from American life and liberation struggles are a core component of womanist thought. In many ways I would say that Pauli provided the early ideological and technical framework for womanist thought.

There is no definite connection I can make concerning the reasons for her absence from past as well as current womanist thought. If I were to speculate, it would be attributable to her grounding in the Episcopal Church. Many of the foundations of the womanist movement were and still are centered in the traditional black church.

Pauli has left behind a firm foundation and has blazed a trail for other women of African heritage to follow. I asked Gayle Harris one day, after so much struggle, so many setbacks, was Pauli finally content and settled with her life and her numerous accomplishments when she passed on July 1, 1985. Gayle responded that she was.

³⁰ Emilie Townes. *In a Blaze of Glory, Womanist Spirituality as a Social Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 36.

³¹ Phillips, 19.

The Rev. Mary Adebonojo

“From about age five I was drawn to something spiritual”³²

When I received Mary’s interview questions by mail, I put the unopened envelope on my home altar and would not open it for three days. In my mind it was sacred text from the second African American woman ordained in TEC. Mary’s writing would certainly be sacred history, a keepsake to be cherished and reserved. I would wait for a quiet moment to snuggle down in my favorite chair and let the content and words wash over me like a cool and refreshing breeze. Mary was honored that I included her in this work. She had never been asked to share her story before.

Mary was born in Chicago, Illinois and attended the 19th Street Baptist Church, a largely middle class African American congregation. She moved to Washington, D.C. following a car accident that left her mother hospitalized for an extended period of time. Her mother’s sister and her legal guardian were in charge of the Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, and made sure that Mary attended each of them. This immersion gave Mary a firm biblical foundation.

She recalls that her extended family were devout Christians. The women were well educated and worked outside the home. Music and art were important and the family frequently sang spirituals and hymns. She was exposed to a wider world view through her uncle, who during and after World War II worked with people who were of different nationalities and cultures. She also remembers that the family members that

³² Mary Adebonojo, interview by author, August 31, 2009.

were Protestant were deeply suspicious of those family members and friends who were Roman Catholic, and vice versa.

Mary remembers receiving a call to ministry from about the age of five, when she was drawn to something spiritual, but at the time she wasn't clear what form her vocation should take. Her call/drawing was to manifest itself in different ways and different times over the course of her life. Mary obtained her undergraduate degree from Radcliffe College and her Master's degree in folklore from the University of California at Berkeley.

Following graduation she accepted a position teaching folklore and serving as Coordinator of the Black Studies Program at Dominican College in San Rafael, California. It was here that she had access to Dominicans extensive library of biblical studies and theology. She remembers reading the library's collection constantly.

As a Consultant in Religious Education from a Black perspective for the Office of Black Ministries of the national church, then headed by Rev. Frank Tuner she had a profound sense of her call.³³ She came to the conclusion that, if she was feeding God's people through workshops and curriculum, she should also be the one feeding them Eucharist. It was then she decided that whatever was "drawing" her, the road she should take in terms of vocation should be to the priesthood rather than the vocational diaconate. It was during this time that Mary wrote the book *Free to Choose*, for religious education for youth from a black perspective.

³³ Later to become Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania 1988-2000.

The ordination process was not fully in place in the Diocese of Pennsylvania when Mary entered the process. She was sponsored by the Church of the Advocate; there was no postulancy or parish committee to help her discern her call to parish ministry. The newly formed Commission on Ministry met less than a week after the first irregular ordination of women to the priesthood.

Barbara Harris, who was then a parishioner at the Advocate, was Mary's companion on her journey. Sue Hiatt served as something of a mentor, but much of her guidance and support came from a large number of African American and white male priests, both in the Diocese of PA and elsewhere, who were enthusiastically in favor of the ordination of women priests.

Since she was over the age of thirty-three and had a master's degree in another discipline, Mary was eligible in the Diocese of Pennsylvania to sit for the General Ordination Exams and be ordained a transitional deacon under what she describes as the "Old Man's Canon after taking a minimal number of courses in the of the GOE's area.³⁴ She was able to take these classes as a special student at Philadelphia Divinity School (PTS), before the school moved to Cambridge and joined Episcopal Theological School (ETS) to become Episcopal Divinity School. Her remaining year was spent at the Lutheran Seminary at Mt. Airy (in Philadelphia) where, to her surprise, the problem with her professor, who taught both the theology and ethics courses, was not her race or gender. It was her age and her high church leanings. Apparently the high church leanings was the norm with the transfers from PDS. Mary was ordained to the diaconate

³⁴ Mary was ordained out of the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia.

in 1977. She could have been ordained to the priesthood in 1977 but she left to live in Nigeria with her husband. On returning to the states in 1979, she was ordained to the priesthood.

Before Mary moved to Nigeria, Bishop Lyman Ogilby of Pennsylvania asked the Archbishop of Nigeria whether he would accept Mary as a priest. He responded with a vigorous “no” and accused the Bishop of trying to force him to accept a woman priest. Not only would Mary not be accepted in Nigeria, she would not be accepted anywhere in Africa. However, he would accept her as a deacon, since they had once had a deaconess in Nigeria from England. The Province of Nigeria still does not ordain women priests.

Some of her work in Nigeria included preaching and conducting services at an interdenominational Christian Chapel at the University of Ife and serving on the Nigerian Council of Churches’ Working Committee for the revision of the religious curriculum in the secondary school.

After her return to Pennsylvania she took a half-time position of vicar/priest-in-charge at St. Matthias. The church is located in a neighborhood that was in transition from white to black, and incurring anger from the former for reaching out to potential members of the latter group. After Mary arrived, a number of whites signaled that they would be leaving the parish. Others gave her a very warm welcome. Soon after, Mary and her husband separated and she needed to seek a full-time position. She enrolled to do a CPE (clinical pastoral education) residency in preparation for a position as a hospital and hospice chaplain. She recalls the reason she left parish ministry,

I felt someone else – someone more extraverted – was needed to do evangelism. I felt that I could work better

where ability to relate to individuals and small groups was important. I felt that I needed to know more about the role of suffering in our lives as Christians and how to deal pastorally with people who are suffering.

She worked two part-time positions, one in a parish and another as a hospital chaplain.

When a full-time position was open at the hospital she accepted and remained there for almost 14 years. Into her 60's, she decided that it was getting to be too much to stay up all night with a dying patient and their family and then work an eight hour day.

Having an interest in shared ministry, Mary interviewed and was accepted for the position as part of a team of missionaries for the Episcopal Shared Ministry of Rockland County, New York. Her work was to develop the ministry of the laity in four targeted parishes and to later broaden the ministry in the Diocese of New York. Even into her second retirement Mary has continued to be involved in community justice work.

Now in her 80's and living in New Hampshire with her second husband, Mary has had time to reflect on her life and ministry. She recalls that was through the efforts of Bishop Barbara that the first group of African American women ordained to the priesthood was supportive of one another. They attended one another's ordinations and celebrations and spent considerable time with one another. Her greatest joys have been participating in the ordination of the first African women to priesthood in Uganda, participating in the consecration of Bishop Barbara Harris, and seeing African Americans whom she has mentored or for whom she has served as spiritual director become fine clergy.

She believes that women of African heritage approach the Church as an extended family, a place to find support, nourishment and relationships. She also believes that the Church is a school for leadership training and support (especially of our young), a center for working with the community towards its upgrading, and inspiring young people to see how the Gospel speaks now to the world in which they live.

Grounded in many spiritual practices, she enjoys: weekly Eucharist, morning Anglican rosary, conversations with Jesus about the anticipated challenges and questions of the day, intercessions, confessions, and thanksgivings throughout the day.

The Right Rev. Barbara Clementine Harris

“Be authentic, be yourself. Do not conform to some kind of model you think is the Episcopal Church.”³⁵

This is a quote from Bishop Barbara C. Harris when asked the question, “What information, advice etc. would you like to pass onto women of African heritage in ministry now?”

I remember my first meeting with Bishop Barbara in her office at The Diocese of Massachusetts. I had just been released by my Bishop John P. Croneberger to find employment in another Diocese, since the Diocese of Newark would not have any job openings. I walked into the meeting scared and nervous. She asked me to speak up because she could not hear me. Over the course of our conversation I grew less and less nervous and more and more comfortable. Eight years later as we sat down over lunch for her interview, there was a new sense of spirit of “connectiveness” with another African American female who had blazed a trail before me.

Barbara was born into an Episcopal family in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They attended St Barnabus Church in the Germantown section. As she says “Being Episcopal was just a given.” Her mother, Beatrice Harris, had been the organist, choir director, and member of the church guild. Barbara was confirmed at 11 and says there was “no hiatus”; she was in the choir, taught church school, and started a young adult group.

³⁵ Barbara Harris, interview by author, Boston, MA. September 16, 2009. All subsequent quotes are taken directly from the interviews.

Her early life was formed by the priests who served her parish, especially Father Ernest S. Thomas. To Barbara he was a teacher, father, guide, and held a strong influence in her Christian formation. She remembers that he also taught her about racism. She was also influenced by her Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Eveline Jones. Mrs. Jones “valued the lives of children.” She was like an aunt.

Before receiving the call to ordination she was active in lay ministry both at St. Barnabus and Church of the Advocate. She served on the vestry and ran a program for prison ministry. She had a feeling God was calling her to a “new dimension” of ministry. After some time of self-searching, she concluded that she was not worthy. This would lead her to what she describes as a “marathon talk” with the Rev. Paul Washington, Rector of Church of the Advocate. The conversation lasted from 7:00 pm until 2:00 am. Father Washington concluded their conversation by saying “at what point do we go to the Bishop?” to which Barbara replied “there is no reason to delay.” She was working at the time as the Public Relations Manager with the Sun Oil Company, managing a team of twenty-six people. She opted with the permission of her bishop, Lyman Oglebee, to take a series of classes at a variety of theological schools in the Philadelphia area. She was exempt from the preaching classes her bishop did not want a class tampering with her gift for preaching. She finished her course of study with some resident courses at Episcopal Divinity School where she was to “integrate into the life of a seminary community.” She recalls with favor that then Dean Harvey Guthrie made her feel part of the EDS community. Her only regret in her course of study was that she was never able to study under The Rev. Dr. James Forbes.

Barbara did not want to be ordained in June as is customary. A June ordination would have meant that she would not be able to serve as a lay deputy to General Convention. After some displeasure from her Bishop, Barbara won out and was ordained in October 1980.

Her first position was as a deacon intern at Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia; also serving as the Executive Director of Episcopal Church Publishing Company. One month before her ordination to the priesthood she was asked to serve at the St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania as Deacon-in-Charge. She recalls that they could be quite difficult to work with. She says she inherited two congregations, "one that ran the dinner dance and one that ran the fashion show. Their idea of stewardship was to see who could sell the most tickets to the Baptists down the street." At one point a group of parishioners were passing around a petition to be presented to the Bishop for her removal to which she responded, "Please bring me the petition so that I may sign it." She spent four years at St. Augustine's; her Bishop thought it would teach her humility. At the 1987, convention for the Diocese of Massachusetts it was agreed that they would hire a Suffragan Bishop. A nominating committee was formed and one of the six nominees was Barbara Harris. In his book *The Miter Fits Just Fine*, the Rev. Mark Bozzuti Jones describes her getting-to-know-you sessions; "She spoke with authority and all were amazed at her wisdom."³⁶ Barbara was elected Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts in September 1988, less than

³⁶ Mark F. Bozzuti-Jones, *The Miter Fits Just Fine* (Cambridge, MA., Cowley Publications, 2003), 76

10 years into her ordained ministry. On February 11, 1989 she was consecrated a bishop, the first woman to be ordained in the episcopate in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

She recalls that over 8500 people were at her consecration, with some 60 bishops in attendance. People came from all over the world. To this day she still runs into people who were there. The local television station was initially scheduled to cover an hour of the service. In the end they provided coverage for all three.

Opponents held her election against her because she was an African American woman, and because she had not been a rector. Some believed she had not followed the “usual” route of seminary training and had been an outspoken advocate for issues of social justice. The Diocese of North Carolina ran a picture of her with the “no” symbol through her face that read, “The Wrong Woman at the Right Time.”

When asked “What was it like being part of the first 11 African American women ordained in the Episcopal Church”. Bishop Barbara responded that Pauli and Mary had gone before her. She fondly remembers Pauli as a woman who would “dress down Jesus Christ.” In recalling her friendship with the first African American women ordained to the priesthood she recalls Pauli Murray attending her ordination, serving as Bishop’s chaplain at Sandye Wilson’s ordination, and preaching at Nan Arrington Peete’s ordination. She also enjoyed some degree of closeness with Alcena Boozer although she lived in Oregon.

When asked what have been her greatest joys, she responded that is was being called to the Episcopate. She finds her joy in confirming and receiving young people and adults into the church, and in having the opportunity to interact with people who have

been affirming of her ministry. She recalls being on Cape Cod for a visitation when a gentleman in his 80's walked up to her and said, "Baby, keep doing what you're doing." She maintains that the people of Massachusetts and around the church continue to be affirming and welcoming to this day.

When reflecting on experiences that are unique to priests who are women of African heritage, she remarks that "initially we have had limited opportunities to serve, this has proven to be a mixed bag. Each one of us has had their own unique experiences and it has ALL been interesting." Her joy has always been her calling to the Episcopate and having the opportunity to interact with people who have been affirming in her ministry. Her stated challenge was believing that "GOD had really called her to ordained ministry."

How do "we" do church as women of African heritage? Bishop Harris took some time to reflect on this question. Her answer was, "The way we do church is reflected in our preaching. Our preaching is scripturally centered." She noted that it is our tendency to cite scripture as contained in the poetry of black hymns. Through that imagery we "draw vivid images of what scripture is trying to say. I usually close with a hymn; my sermons are laced with hymnody."

A strong prayer life keeps Bishop Barbara centered, as well as people in the church. She keeps in touch with clergy colleagues. She looks forward to her bi-monthly meeting with clergy and lay people at the Diocese of Massachusetts offices. Her support resources are three current Trustees at Episcopal Divinity School with whom she regularly chats and breaks bread.

When asked about her experience with “ism’s” she stated that classism is a given. Her retirement has offered her an opportunity to travel on preaching and speaking engagements. She tries as best she can to try to honor invitations from small parishes. The advice she gives to those female seminarians of African heritage is, “be authentic, be yourself, don’t try to conform to some kind of model you think is The Episcopal Church.”

The Rev. Sandye Wilson

“Be yourself be happy and proud of who you are. God don’t make no junk!”³⁷

The Rev. Sandye Wilson has got to be one of the busiest priests that I know. I first met Sandye face to face during The Diocese of Newark Convention in 2002. I was in my last year of seminary and she had just been called to be rector at St. Andrew and Holy Communion Church in South Orange, New Jersey. She was at that time the only African American female rector in the diocese. As a candidate for ordination, I sought her out, and as they say, sat at the feet of one who has gone before. From that point on an invitation was extended and a door was always open for further conversations and check-ins. During our interview she commented that the first twelve African American women ordained to the priesthood were all left-handed.

Sandye was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the daughter of what she describes as a mixed-marriage. Her father was a sixth generation Episcopalian and her mother was Roman Catholic. In order for her mother to marry outside the faith, her father had to agree to raise the children in the Catholic tradition. She remembers well the Saturday confessions. In the fourth grade her parents gave her and her twin a choice as to which church they wanted to attend. They chose the Episcopal Church. But her early life in “ministry” came as a first grader when she proceeded to bless the priest. It continued when she came home from church and took a biscuit cutter, linens and the oil and vinegar cruets and proceeded to set up communion on the piano bench. After reading the Bible

³⁷ Sandra Wilson, interview by author, by phone. October 4, 2009

cover to cover at age 16 she knew that she wanted to be a priest. She remarked that being a nun was out of the question.

The call to ordination didn't come with a bang but with the quietness of a still, almost imperceptible voice. It was a call to be a contemplative activist. Sandye tells her life story in wonderfully vivid imagery. In her sense of call she sees herself as a "vessel through which God's grace is imparted to people and to the world." Her sense of call is to be a "coach, encourager, a vision bearer, to walk with folks during difficult times." She believes that she is called to have a pastor's heart, a keen intellect, and to speak truth to power.

Sandye felt that before she began the process she needed to have work experience in the secular world and to be able to contextualize the experience. Her secular experiences included work as a corporate lending officer, a micro-economist, and a reporter and writer in business and economics. While living in New York City, she became involved with the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine. It was here that she began her foray into parish ministry. After being accepted into the process and carefully considering her seminary options, she chose to attend Union Theological Seminary. She recalls that at the time there were two other students actively involved with the Office of Black Episcopal Seminarians (OBES), Nelson Foxx and Michele Thornton. Kelly Brown Douglas was to follow Sandye at Union.

She describes her ordination process as being good and fair. There were two prayer book examinations that were part of her General Ordination Exam process, one for the 1979 edition and the other for the 1929. She says, "They wanted to make sure that

people were up to snuff.” Out of the twenty-eight people with whom she entered the process, there were only three who made it through to ordination. The Bishops involved with her formation were The Rt. Rev. Paul Moore,³⁸ The Rt. Rev. Walter Dennis,³⁹ and The Rt. Rev. Harold L. Wright.⁴⁰ Sandye was the first African American woman ordained in the Diocese of New York, in 1980.

She has been blessed with a myriad of mentors and people foremost in her journey to ordained leadership: Pauli Murray, The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman,⁴¹ and The Rev. Jeffrey Cuffee, to name a few of her supporters. One of the stories she shares about Pauli was that Sandye was teaching her how to sing mass before the Delta Sigma Theta Boulé.⁴² Pauli practiced and practiced, and then on the day of the celebration of the Eucharist, in her “Clark Wallaby shoes,” she said, “Oh, hell I can’t sing that.” She spent hours in conversation with Pauli, about God, life, poetry and friends. Sandye last spoke with Pauli on June 30, 1985, before she passed away the next day.

The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman was considered by Sandye and others to be a 20th century holy man. She describes him as a man of few words. She credits the Rev. A.

³⁸ The Rt. Rev. Paul Moore (1919 – 2003), the 13th Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York

³⁹ The Rt. Rev. Walter D. Dennis (1932 – 2003), Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, second African-American male to be consecrated bishop. Sandye remained in conversation with Bishop Dennis for 25 years, no matter where they lived.

⁴⁰ The Rt. Rev. Harold L. Wright, Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, 1974-1978.

⁴¹ The Rev. Dr Howard Thurman (1899 – 1981), Dean of Theology at the Chapels at Howard University and Boston University. He was known as a black mystic. Thurman also served as spiritual advisor to Pauli Murray.

⁴² Delta Sigma Theta Boulé, ΔΣΘ, is a Greek-lettered sorority of college educated women who perform public service and place emphasis on the African-American community. They were founded at Howard University, Washington, DC on January 13, 1915. Boulé is the regulating institution of the sorority and meets every two years.

Jeffrey Cuffee Jr. with teaching her how to be a priest, to make the needs of others paramount. His words to her were, “be by being.”

Her first position was as a curate at Grace Episcopal Church in White Plains, NY. She recalls the services like this: “It was a salt shaker at the 8:00, pepper at the 9:15, salt and a bit of pepper at the 10:30, and hot sauce at the 12:30.” To Sandye it was a joy to do ministry. She was active in mission and outreach, reaching out to those in prisons and in mental facilities.

Sandye was called to be rector of St. Mark’s Church in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1982, becoming the first African American female to be the rector of a parish. Almost simultaneously she began to combine her parish ministry with her love of academia, holding parallel positions on the faculty of institutions of higher education. She sums up her ministry by saying, “[My ministry] is to help others discover their gifts, to celebrate their gifts and for me to then move on.”

“Great” is the word she used to describe being part of the first group of African American female priests. She further describes the sisterhood of female priests as providing a deep rooted sense of commitment, support, and the comfort of having women praying for each other’s safety, health and ministry.

While the joys in her ministry are bounteous, a few are extraordinary, inspiring, and indelibly etched on one’s memory, such as seeing people fall in love and be involved with God, witnessing people’s perseverance in their spiritual development, the dazzle in their eyes when they know they are in tune with goodness and divine grace. Perceiving

when people are able to recognize Christ in one another, and realizing “what we do and what we say makes a difference in the community.”

“We have a unique opportunity” she affirms “To bring a lived hermeneutic to what we say and do as priest of African American heritage.” She believes that female clergy of African heritage have an opportunity to set an example for young women regarding dress, attitude, speech and style. African American women represent their race, and the heritage of the women who came before them and those who will follow.

Sandye believes that music is the universal language that embodies how women of African heritage “do church.” We draw on music “from a variety of sources with a message to come and see” and “run and tell.” Feeding people on all levels and developing a connection with God are key components in her ministry. “Overworked overachievers” and “natural born leaders” are words that she uses to describe women of African heritage working in ministry.

What keeps Sandye spiritually centered in her life is daily morning and evening prayers, visits to Iona, and the singing and chanting of a Taize service. She enjoys talking on the phone and reads regularly. Her support comes from the touchstones of her life, good friends and colleagues.

When asked about her relationship with Black male clergy in the Diocese of Newark, she says that it is “generally good because I do all the work.” She believes that the Christ in her needs to meet the Christ in them.”

Her encounters with racism, sexism and other “isms” are on a daily encounter. She continues, “People are scared of you, because they think you have too much power.”

If you have “corporate memory” then you are scary. She concludes by saying that “people are scared of power.”

After twenty-nine years in ministry the advice she would like to pass on is, “be yourself, be happy and proud of who you are. God don’t make no junk! You are a gift to God and to the church.” She then recall, some advice given to her by Bishop Paul Moore: “remember to keep priorities straight, first is family, second is your prayer life and third is to the ministry, and never get comfortable in your ministry.” She continues “everyone has a gift, celebrate those gifts.” “Your responsibility is to help others discover their gifts. She said, to quote Bishop Barbara, “It is better to be loving than to be right.”

The Rt. Rev. Gayle Elizabeth Harris

“I am a priest not by putting on the collar. I am a priest by putting on the cross.”⁴³

I recall that June 1, 2000 was sunny and seasonably cool, a perfect day for the election of a new Suffragan Bishop in the Diocese of Massachusetts. A number of students, including myself, were attending a Congregational Studies workshop at Episcopal Divinity School. We had been staying abreast of the slate of candidates and the balloting. Names had been swirling around since Bishop Barbara had announced her retirement. Emails had been sent regarding who would have their names placed in nomination and who shouldn’t. Even before Barbara’s announcement was made formal, the name of Gayle Harris from Rochester, New York was on the tip of most everybody’s tongue as Massachusetts’ next Bishop Suffragan. As the election began one of my classmates had her cell phone with her and kept receiving phone calls from convention regarding the voting results. It was during our afternoon break that we received word that Gayle had been elected on the second ballot.

Gayle’s consecration was held at Trinity Church, Copley Square, on January 18, 2003, one of the coldest days of that winter. I was sitting near the front in the pews that were reserved for members of the Union of Black Episcopalians. Although the weather was brutally cold, the service was filled with the warmth of the spirit. The party afterwards included a myriad of black bishops, clergy and laity, some of whom I had not seen from my childhood days at Grace Episcopal Church in Detroit.

⁴³ Gayle E. Harris, interview by author, Cambridge, MA. September 17, 2009.

Gayle's roots are solidly Midwestern. She was born in Cleveland, Ohio, but the family moved to Chicago, Illinois when she was young. Her religious upbringing was between her mother's Baptist church and her father's United Methodist church. She also spent time in the Episcopal church as well as the Presbyterian church with her cousins. At the age of 14, when given a choice into which denomination she would like to be baptized, she choose the Presbyterian Church. It was at Chatham United Presbyterian Church in Chicago that she preached her first sermon.

It was in 1973, during her undergraduate years at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, that she joined the Episcopal Church. She recalls that 1975 was an exciting time in the church, with women's ordination on the agenda at the General Convention. It was during this time that she says she received the call to ordained ministry. Originally, she had set her eyes on becoming a permanent deacon. However, her vicar at Holy Cross Chapel asked her, "Why would you limit yourself." That same night God spoke to her and said that she was called to be His priest. The Bishop of Chicago, James Montgomery, posed a question to her. He asked, what she would do if General Convention did not approve the ordination of women. Gayle responded: "it's going to happen." She still ran away from the call for another two years, but God spoke to her impatiently one evening, as she was driving in Chicago. She answered, "ok Lord", and knew then she had to get serious.

After acceptance into the process, Gayle attended Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP). She was the first African American to be admitted and the second African American to attend in ten years. She appreciated the theological education and

the diversity of denominations that were represented at the seminary. She appreciated CDSP treating students as though they already had a ministry and were being called to another level. At the time, Bishop John Walker was serving on the Board of Trustees at CDSP; he was able to provide her with a pastoral presence. She recalls the “twinkle in his eye” and “an all knowing look” when they first met.

When Gayle made visits home she would meet with Bishop James Montgomery. However it was Bishop Quentin Primo, who really was her spiritual guide during her process. He was her mentor in many ways, telling her what to do and what not to do. He kept reminding her that because she was a black woman she had to be twice as good as everyone else. He gave her advice on what to read, how to carry herself, who to make contact with, and what kind of events she should attend. He became more of a parish priest to her.

Her final interview for the diaconate took place in the spring of 1981. At that time she was informed that the committee had given her an ordination date of June 19th. She was to have her own ordination and would not be ordained in the Cathedral on June 5th with her male candidates. Her ordination was to take place in her home parish. When she asked if Bishop Primo could ordain her, Bishop Montgomery said to her with great patience, “This will be the only opportunity that I will be able to lay hands on you and I want to say I laid hands on you. Now let’s talk about what diocese will you be going to get a job?”

Looking back she understood his reasoning. She would have been a bit of a problem to place in a position. Male black clergy were against women’s ordination.

Black men served black churches and white men served white church and there was no mixing of the races.

She left for the Diocese of Newark, two days after her ordination to the deaconate. She had accepted a position as curate at Grace Van Borst, in Jersey City. Once again Gayle was not permitted to be ordained to the priesthood with the other men. Bishop John Shelby Spong ordained Gayle in February of 1982. It was then Rev. Chet Talton who preached at her ordination. She remembers him saying, "I wish I were you Gayle, I wish I were you, young, gifted, black and female." She recalls that people were in shock and disbelief. But he also said, "enjoy this night, enjoy this night Gayle because once you are priested, you will be entering the belly of the beast of racism." He said it so strongly that Bishop Spong had to give a second sermon during the offertory.

Although conditions were less than ideal in Jersey City, Gayle flourished in her ministry. She was pastor of a parish whose congregation consisted of drug addicts, people receiving government assistance, and a few professionals. It was a parish that had been very involved in social justice ministry but had fallen on hard times. She was able to take her ministry into the streets of Jersey City, where she was known as Father Gayle.

With her ministry developed and grounded in community works, she became the assistant and urban resident at St. Phillips the Evangelist in Washington, D.C. The parish was known for its outreach, its sense of fellowship, and for some of the best music in the black worship tradition. She went from there to become Priest-in-Charge at Holy Communion Church. Once again she was a viable presence in the community,

welcoming people in to the church. The church serves today as the Bishop John T. Walker School for Boys.

Her first call as a rector was to the newly merged parish of St. Luke's and St. Simon in Rochester, New York. St. Luke's Parish was the mother church in Rochester. Founded by Col. Rochester, it had the building and the money, but a dying congregation. St. Simon of Cymene was founded by blacks who had moved North after World War I and they had the people. Her job was to make the congregation function as one. She thought it would be the parish from which she could retire. She found joy in this parish and the journey that they shared together. It was from her garden in Rochester that she received the call from Bishop M. Thomas Shaw III, that she had been elected Bishop Suffragan

"A self sustaining community of sisters," is how Gayle describes being part of the first class of ordained African American women. She recalls that most of the women came from the northeast corridor: Sandye from New York, Pauli from Baltimore and Washington D.C., Norma was in Washington, D.C., Mary and Barbara from Philadelphia and Anne and Nan from New York. They were always just a sister away from each other. They shared a concern that other sisters of African heritage would not be lifted up to ordained ministry. It felt as though it would be a long time before getting past the number fifteen.

Gayle's greatest joy is being part of TEC. She is so proud of and nurtured by the church. She believes that it is through our Baptismal covenant that we understand that we are first Christians, second Episcopalians, and that we live in the diversity of that

understanding. Some of the frustration she feels is when she sees people who do not “respect the dignity of every human being,” in seeking and finding Christ in every person. She believes that we have more in common than not: “Our holiness is not based on what we do or don’t do; it is based on God’s presence. I cannot see God walking away from any of us, if we are willing to walk with God and each other.”

Still, she experiences times of racism and sexism: “Our church reflects our society and our society reflects our church. We black women are admired for our strength, but at times this can become offensive to others. We don’t know our place when we try to assume our full leadership in this church. It is fine to admire Oprah and Michelle Obama, from afar. It would be different if they put on vestments and called themselves your priest or bishop.”

The people who were foremost in Gayle’s journey are and have been the best of the best of black male clergy. She was lucky enough to experience the Union of Black Episcopalians at its best. During the 1980’s, UBE was politically astute, theologically grounded and strategic in understanding its mission. She has kept company with some of the best clergy of African heritage in the church, Bishop Chet Talton, Bishop Frank Turner, Rev. Herald Lewis, Rev. Joe Green, and Bishop Barbara Harris. Among the laity she remembers the late Mattie Hawkins, who she called the backbone of UBE, the lay people of Holy Cross Chapel, and her cousin Jane Harris Logan.

She feels her sense of call from the time she wakes up until she goes to sleep. When asked would she be happy, content or satisfied doing anything else, she said no. Even when being a priest can be frustrating, demanding and stressful, it is always full of

grace. She would not be complete in her being if she wasn't a priest. "It is not about putting on the collar, it is about putting on the cross. The collar comes after the cross." She says that this is the way she gets dressed in the morning. "People can sometimes get confused with symbols and positions, but we are called because it is part of our being."

The list would be exhaustive if I were to name all of the groups that Gayle has been involved in. She is serving on the CREDO board, the National Church Theology Committee, and has recently stepped down as the Vice-Chairperson of the Church Pension Fund. She has served on standing committees, bishop search committees, and as deputy to General Convention, to name just a few of her contributions and involvements.

The words she passes on to women of African descent are to "remember that you are a child of God, precious and beloved, lay or ordained and no one can take it away. Let joy abound and strength be nourished." The last is "no matter what, God loves you and there is nothing that anyone else can do about it. God loves you and will always love you."

The Rev. Canon Nan Arrington Peete

“The Kingdom is not here yet.”⁴⁴

“Women of African heritage are more grounded in the gospel of Jesus. We know in the deepest part of our soul that we are a beloved child of God. The people of God help us to believe it. The unconditional love we have we want to share without bounds.” This quote from Nan Peete describes women of African heritage are engaged in the work of the church.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, Nan remembers that her earliest memory of her religious and spiritual upbringing was influenced by her grandmother, Clanton. After high school she married and had two children. The family then relocated to Los Angeles. Her first encounter with the Episcopal Church in Los Angeles was after she saw the 1963 cover of Ebony magazine featuring the singer, Nat King Cole and his family. The article mentioned that they attended St. James Episcopal Church on Wilshire Boulevard. She arrived at the church and recalls a frosty reception from even the black members of the congregation. After that experience the family began attending St. John’s, located in downtown Los Angeles, which was later to be her sponsoring parish. The parish was active in issues of social and political justice. She recalls that the parish kept its front doors locked in opposition to the draft. It also ran a draft counseling center and provided a great deal of outreach to the community it served. Nan was extremely active in the

⁴⁴ Nan Arrington Peete, interview by author, September 25, 2009.

parish while pursuing both her B.A. in economics and M.A. in human resource management.

Her call to the ordained priesthood came to her while listening to a Sunday sermon at her parish. She said to herself, “I should be up there preaching,” to which she answered, “I don’t think so” followed by, “Why not me?” When she went to dinner with her husband, Robert, and shared her thoughts, he responded by saying “Now you’ll get paid for what you do for free.” She then began the ordination process, becoming the first African-American female to be ordained in the Diocese of Los Angeles. She recalls when Barbara Harris had spent some time in conversation with her talking about the ordination process. With two high school age children, she could not uproot her family. Her seminary education began at Bloy House, a seminary program of the Diocese of Los Angeles, which caters to commuting students. She still maintained a full-time job as a management consultant with Coopers and Lybrand accounting firm. In 1982, after her children left for college, she enrolled in General Theological Seminary (GTS) for her last two years.

While GTS was not her first choice, she loved seminary. Here she had the chance to shape and form her spiritual connection. When she arrived at GTS she recalls that “there was still controversy over women seminarians and priests.”⁴⁵ During her time at General Theological Seminary, Nan and Ann Holmes Redding became close friends. Both black and white classmates were not completely embracing of either Nan or Ann.

⁴⁵ Quoted in *A Historical Overview of the Presence and Experience of the African Diaspora at the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church*. Thesis for the degree of Master of Divinity, Robert Jermonde Taylor, May 20, 2009, 41.

When she went to investigate her field education setting, she knew that there were “many black male priests in Manhattan who did not accept women seminarians or priests.”⁴⁶ She found a mentor and teacher in the Rev. Canon Frederick B. Williams (GTS 1963).⁴⁷ Canon Williams was serving as rector of Church of the Intercession on 155th Street in Manhattan. He was considered an excellent field education supervisor and mentor to black female seminarians. Another one of Canon Williams’ seminarians during this time was Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, who was attending Union Theological Seminary at the same time.⁴⁸ One of her more memorable experiences was at a community meeting at GTS when the topic of inclusive language in worship was raised. She remembers walking outside the seminary after the discussion and being called all sorts of names: “Inside the seminary, my gender and race were not represented and God was always he. When we tell our stories in the context of scripture and reality, it makes an impact on people.” Under Nan’s influence GTS adopted an inclusive language policy.

She recalls fondly the people who have been her mentors along the way like Barbara Harris who believed in her and supported her during her process and her move into ordained ministry. Nan was ordained in 1984. Barbara Harris preached at her ordination. Her first position was as a curate at St. Mark’s church in Upland, California. A 700 member parish, inclusive of its four black members. After a year at St. Mark’s she was called to become rector of All Saints Church in Indianapolis. It was at All Saints that her ministry soared. She recounts to Mary S. Donovan in her book *Women Priests in the*

⁴⁶ Taylor, 41.

⁴⁷ The Rev. Canon Frederick Boyd Williams, (April 23, 1939 – April 4, 2008).

⁴⁸ Dr. Brown-Douglas is the Director of the Religion Program at Goucher College, Baltimore, MD.

Episcopal Church:

All Saints draws members from throughout the city. “The congregation represents the broad spectrum of the body of Christ,” said Peete. “We have relatively few children, several families, many singles – it’s about thirty percent black. Many people have been surprised that a high-church parish would call a women priest.....All Saints parish has a true sense of what Catholicism means in terms of being universal and accepting of people.⁴⁹

She hit the ground running at All Saints, serving as administrator for the Parish’s outreach program as well as providing to the pastoral needs of her congregation.

It was during this time that she was invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Alexander Kennedy Runcie, to serve as the first ordained woman to address the 1988 Lambeth Conference. The Archbishop had appointed her as a consultant to the conference. In that role she addressed all of the bishops of the Anglican Communion on the feast of Mary Magdalene (July 22) in a program carried on closed circuit television. She was also a speaker at the pre-Lambeth meeting in Cambridge of the Afro-Anglican bishops.

The Rt. Rev. Frank Kellogg Allan asked her to consider the position as Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of Atlanta after becoming aware of her work.⁵⁰ In her discernment she felt at this time that she had been called to serve on a Bishop’s staff. She accepted the position in 1989, despite protests from within the Diocese. While Bishop Allan was very supportive of women’s ordination he was less so when it came to matters of the inclusion of gay and lesbian clergy. By the end of her time on the Diocesan staff in

⁴⁹ Mary S. Donovan, *Women Priests in the Episcopal Church* (Forward Movement Publication, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1988) 142.

⁵⁰ Bishop Allan, 8th Bishop of the Diocese of Atlanta, 1987 – 1989.

1994, because of her ministry, Bishop Allan would become an ally. She considers Atlanta, where she had to deal face to face with issues of racism and sexism, to be the hardest position that she has held. However, she believes the Diocese is not the same, and is more inclusive in areas of race and culture because of her ministry.

She was called to Trinity Church on Wall Street in 1994 by The Rt. Rev. Herbert A. Donovan, Jr. to be the Associate for Pastoral Care and Outreach.⁵¹ At a church known for its diversity of worship and attendance, she bridged the spectrum of a parish of wealthy patronage on the weekdays and a parish of color on Sundays. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows remembers Nan as a beacon of light and support to black seminarians.

What a blessing she received when she was called in 1999, by the late Rt. Rev. Herbert Thompson to be the Canon for Ministry in the Diocese of Ohio.⁵² Here she was responsible for the ordination process, clergy deployment, and the congregational search process. From there she accepted a call to serve as Canon for Clergy Deployment and Ordination in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. She notes that she has held the same position three times with different titles.

Nan has retired from the Diocese of Washington but is still serving as a national consultant for parishes. Her other retirement position is working at Holy Communion Parish in Washington, DC.

⁵¹ Bishop Donovan had served as the 11th Bishop of Arkansas from 1981 – 1993. He was called as vicar in 1993 and served until 1997.

⁵² Bishop Thompson, (1932-2006) served as the 8th Bishop of the Diocese of Southern Ohio from 1988 -2005.

She did not think about being part of the first group of African American women to be ordained in the Episcopal Church as the time it was happening but she reflects, “Barbara Harris, Gayle Harris, Ann Holmes Redding and Sandye Wilson and I were bonded together to form a community.” She recalls that black male clergy were not supportive of them at a Black Clergy Conference that was held in Ocean City in 1987. The treatment continued at the Afro-Am Conference that was held in Barbados when a group spoke out against women priests with Barbara Harris sitting on the panel. It was the late Bishop Walter Dennis who to that opposition affirming the ministry of women.⁵³ Other supporters would include Rev. Kwasi Thornell, Rev. Cn. Fred Williams, and Bishop. Frank Turner and Rev. Cn. Harold Lewis.

Because of the amazing support she has received from clergy and friends during her ministry, she passes these words on to women in the process, “not to be a lone ranger, develop a support system, and do not get caught up in the negative and to always find joy.” As a woman priest she feels that we are called to “love ourselves as we are.” A reminder she shares is that “just because we have a woman Presiding Bishop doesn’t mean that the ‘isms’ are done.” She is kept grounded and centered by friends in and outside the church, her telephone and an avid interest in professional sports teams. Finally she says “The kingdom is not here yet.”

⁵³ Bishop Walter Decoster Dennis (1932-2003), Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, 1979-1998. The second African American in the Diocese to hold post and the 19th Black Bishop of the Episcopal Church.

Chapter II: Colleagues

The Rev. Jennifer Baskerville Burrows

“Can You Break Through the Ceiling?”⁵⁴

The assumption that female clergy of African heritage by the virtue of their color automatically make them the best candidates for positions in the black church needs to be eliminated. The life experiences of my colleagues have been eclectic, by virtue of the necessity to function in a multi- cultural, multiethnic and multiracial society and the world. We find comfort, security, and naturalness in whatever group we find ourselves. These stories shed some light on what this new generation of ministry in TEC is experiencing.

“There are jobs or churches that I applied to that I didn't get considered for,” she said. “But when I see some of my friends who are white males who have the same difficulty in getting those level jobs, then I go, 'It's all about what's the right fit.'”

Despite her popularity at Grace Church and in the Central New York area, Baskerville-Burrows does not doubt that one day she may hit a glass ceiling because of her race. She does encounter the occasional stereotyping.

“I had this one person say to me, 'well, I want to talk to you about urban ministry,” Baskerville-Burrows said. “I was like, 'I don't know about urban ministry. I just got here! I'm going to be doing urban ministry, but just because I'm black doesn't mean I've done it. I've been in wealthy churches the whole time. I don't know anything about poverty.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, interview by author, September 28, 2009.

⁵⁵ “*Female Priest’s Views Differ from Mainstream Christian Values*”, Miyoko Ohtake, The Daily Orange, January 15, 2007. www.dailyorange.com (accessed October 17, 2009).

In the pecking order of women of African heritage working in all white congregations, we would all agree that Jennifer is our trailblazer. I heard of Jennifer's ministry at St. Peter's in Morristown, New Jersey, and in the wider church when I was wrestling with my own call to ministry in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.⁵⁶

Jennifer came to The Episcopal Church after she graduated from college with a concentration in architecture and historic preservation. Moving to New York City she joined Trinity Church Wall Street. It was there she met The Rev. Canon Lloyd S. Casson. She was drawn at this time to the environmental work that was being done at Trinity. She recalls a conversation with God in which God said "You can combine religion, architecture and art." It was also at this time that she met and was mentored by Rev. Nan Arrington Peete, who was on the Trinity staff. Jennifer recalls that Nan was a mentor to her providing pastoral counseling and her wisdom and advice. Jennifer was honored since she had thought to herself that "the great Nan Peete surely would not have time for me." Choosing to return to graduate school Jennifer was accepted to Cornell University, and commuting to New York City proved to be challenging. She transferred her membership to the Episcopal Church at Cornell University. She was accepted into the process in 1994 and that Fall began her seminary training at Church Divinity School of the Pacific. She was ordained as a Deacon in June 1997 and to the Priesthood in February 1998.

⁵⁶ Jennifer has been involved on the Commission on the Status of Women, Episcopal Women's Caucus, Deputy at the 2006 and 2009 General Convention, Council of Advice for the President of the House of Deputies Bonnie Anderson

Her first position was serving as an Associate at St. Paul's in Endicott, New York. She recalls that the town was where IBM was founded, but at that time it was a dying industrial town. There were four African-Americans including herself in a congregation of 150. They were "Anglo-Catholic in a low belly church building." This proved to be an isolating and lonely experience. She spent her time taking on some historic preservation work, gardening and piano lessons. Although there was a 30 year age difference between her and the rector, she recalls that he became her mentor. Class differences played a larger part of the picture than race. She remained at this position for a year and a half.

She left St. Paul's to become Associate Rector at St. Peter's in Morristown, New Jersey. The Rev. Zachary Fleetwood created a position tailored to what she wanted: Christian Formation, youth, women's ministry. She recalls being the "only" when she arrived; the only woman of color on staff, the only woman of color in the Diocese of Newark. The cultural divides were huge and it was difficult for her to have a conversation sometimes with her male clergy of color. Jennifer was serving at St. Peter's when September 11th happened. There were a number of parishioners that were lost and she recalls that the situation "was tough and a lot of work." She knew that CDSP was looking for a Director of Alumni and Church Relations; she applied and accepted the position in 2002. She also served as the Pastoral Associate at All Saint's, San Francisco.

Realizing that she was more an east coast than west coast person, she welcomed an opportunity that was presented for her to move east again. In December of 2003 for her to become the part-time rector at Grace Church, and part-time chaplain at Hendrick's

Chapel at Syracuse University. Grace is a racially diverse church known for its history of social activism.⁵⁷ The work she is currently engaged in allows her to express her greatest joys, “walking with people as they dig into their spiritual life.” She says “It is the young people that are bringing life to the parish.” Her challenge is being a half-time priest at both places. She notes that being half-time makes getting things done a lot slower. She notes that because she had moved much in her ministry she feels a call to stay at Grace for a while.

Her spiritual practices involve daily prayer that looks different every day, yoga, and spiritual direction. Support resources include friends and colleagues, women’s clergy groups, visioning and managing change with her Congregational Development Coach, and attending spiritual retreats.

The wisdom that she would like to pass on to women of African heritage in the process would be to be savvy and authentic. She believes that church, while being well-intentioned can also be fickle. She also stresses that it is important to have a council of advisors, and friends whom you can go to for anything, to laugh, to cry and to celebrate.

⁵⁷ The Rev. David Pendleton Oakerhater was baptized and deaconed at Grace. He is the first Native American saint in the Episcopal Church.

The Rev. Monique Ellson

“God will do the work of transformation”⁵⁸

It is often said in TEC that we all know each other, or certainly know someone who knows someone. This is certainly the case with Monique and I. Our paths and mine have crossed a number of times and we had never met each other until her name was recommended for this project. She was baptized by Rev Frederick Boyd Williams, while he was serving as rector of St. Clements Episcopal Church, Inkster, Michigan. Her mother served as the parish administrator. This meant that Monique went to church every day during the summer. It was here that she became comfortable in church and comfortable with clergy. Later the family transferred its membership to St. Matthews & St. Joseph’s Church in Detroit, Michigan,⁵⁹ where The Rev. Orris Walter was serving as priest.⁶⁰ As a sports enthusiast Monique’s call to ordination followed coaching a really bad volleyball match. She recalls it well: a voice said “Monique you will be a priest in the church.” She immediately called her mother and a good friend to assist her in making some sense of this provocative and prophetic message.

Because of transitions that were occurring at St. Matthews & St. Josephs, Monique was sponsored out of Christ Church, Detroit and chose to attend seminary at Seabury Western in Evanston, Illinois.⁶¹ In her MDiv program she was the only person

⁵⁸ Monique Ellson, interview by author, October 8, 2009.

⁵⁹ Established in 1845 St Matthews was the oldest African-American Episcopal parish in Detroit. The church was closed and merged with St. Joseph’s in 1971.

⁶⁰ Rev Walker was later elected as the Bishop of Long Island.

⁶¹ In the fall of 2008 the seminary no longer matriculates students for the traditional Masters of Divinity degree.

of any color. While the seminary did have a component of anti-racism training, it was felt among the student body that it was more of a cursory guilt trip than a beneficial process. After some conversation with both faculty and staff, Crossroads⁶² was brought in to engage participants in a more substantive view of diversity, an invitation which proved to be beneficial for the school. Nevertheless, the road to ordination she describes as difficult. She remembers that she had very little contact with her Commission on Ministry liaison. It wasn't a particularly prayerful time of discernment for her, most of the time she felt that she was jumping through hoops just to stay ahead of the curve. Monique's call to ordination never waned and she ordained in June of 2002.

Her first cure was as an assistant at St. Paul's Church in Lansing, Michigan. While she was very pleased to be able to work with the rector, Rev. Gordon Weller, her desire was to work in the city of Detroit. St. Paul's was a predominately white parish, with a variety of outreach projects and programs. The parish was one of the first in the Diocese of Michigan to establish a Sudanese education program for a number of young men who had moved into the area. One of the challenges that she faced was of being true to herself so that it was during this time that she came out as an lesbian. While it was a time of liberation for her, she recalls that a number of people left the parish as a result.

Her next position was as the Assistant Rector at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, located in the heart of Philadelphia's Society Hill area. She sees her ministry as a one on one for God, where she is called to make disciples, and empower those people for the work of ministry. In this she believes that the church should be composed of more than

⁶² The work of Crossroads is to dismantle systemic racism and build anti-racist multicultural diversity within institutions and communities.

just the duties of a priest as it is outline in the Book of Common Prayers, it should be seen as a working community. She recalls that it was difficult for her to “find her place” at St Peters. After a period of discernment the parish and Monique amicably parted ways.

Subsequently, Monique has moved to the Washington D.C. area. Her passion for parish ministry she sees as a place for evangelism, church growth, and connection to the community. She is currently serving as an Assisting Priest at the historical African-American parish of St. Luke’s in Washington D.C.⁶³ She considers this time to be a place of continued discernment, moving into a place where God is calling her to minister. She is thankful for Rev. Virginia Nolan-Brown⁶⁴ for giving her a place to take her hat off. She is also thankful to The Rt. Rev. Eugene Sutton⁶⁵ and his staff who have made a place for her in the Diocese of Maryland. Some of her greatest joys are to sit across the table with someone who loves God, but nobody knows it but them, or, to watch the members of St. Luke’s who are in their eighties connect with people in their twenties, and vice versa.

Throughout this journey Monique has been guided by her spiritual director, great friends and her key mentor The Rev. Bonny Perry, rector of All Saints, Chicago, Illinois. It was under the tutelage of Rev. Perry that she recognized her passion for community organizing and getting outside the parish walls to conduct one-on-one interviews.

⁶³ St. Luke’s is the first African-American parish established in Washington D.C. in 1873. The Rev. Dr. Alexander Crommell was its first rector.

⁶⁴ Rector, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church

⁶⁵ Bishop Sutton is the 14th Bishop of the Diocese of Maryland and the thirty-ninth Black Bishop in the Episcopal Church.

In her time as a priest she would see the unique experiences of women of African heritage as being “unique”, “We are called to be chameleon like; the dominant culture expects us to meet them, not the other way around.” ‘She feels that lately female priests of African heritage are taking more and more positions in white congregations. Stories are what she believes to be the cornerstone for how “we” do church. From her community organizing experience it’s that place of telling and listening to stories where we find God working among us. Out of that conviction she says, “God will do the work of transformation.”

The Rev. Cheryl E. Parris

“May God grant you the grace to pray the Eucharist like it is your first time and your last time, because it is.”⁶⁶

This is one of the many tidbits of advice that The Rev. Cheryl Parris shared with some new ordinands. After our interview, Cheryl and I now share a connection in our ministry as women of African heritage. Cheryl, who is now part of my quilt pattern, had also closely woven pieces of her life with the Rev. Dawn Baskerville-Burrows years before.⁶⁷ Cheryl states early that her process toward ministry was far from smooth.

Cheryl is a sixth generation Anglican/ Episcopalian from a family from Trinidad and Tobago. She grew up at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church located at 127th and Fifth Avenue in New York City. She later recalled that the parish was a major influence in her life. She felt called to the priesthood at the age of eleven while in junior choir. In the quietness of the upstairs pews of the neo-gothic church she would have real life conversations with God. In one of the conversations she remembers the response, “I want you to serve here.”

By Cheryl’s 18th birthday her rector at that time said that he felt that she was called to ordained ministry. Then he said that because he did not believe in women’s ordination, she would not receive his support. As painful as this was, Cheryl left the parish of her youth, and after some church shopping she landed at Trinity Church Wall

⁶⁶ Cheryl Parris, interview by author, October 5, 2009. See the full list of Cheryl’s suggestions at the end of this section.

⁶⁷ Cheryl, meet Jennifer at a Union of Black Episcopalians meeting and have been friends ever since. Jennifer states “I wouldn’t be a priest if it wasn’t for Cheryl Parris”

Street. After realizing that the discernment process would not work out at Trinity, she returned to St. Andrews. The rector had recently left in protest over Barbara Harris' consecration. Starting the ordination process there anew she went before the Commission on Ministry (COM) only to be told "not yet." In speaking with the late Canon Frederick B. Williams, she recalled that he said that the COM didn't feel that she paid enough respect to her elders and that was one of the detriments to her process.

After another few bumps in the road she was finally accepted into the process and started at Bexley Hall at the Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. Nearing her completion of her studies she remembers calling out to God, "I'll go where you want me to go and I'll do what you want me to do." Soon after, she received a phone call from Rev. James Snodgrass from St. Stephens, Olean, New York, who said "We want you to work for us." Cheryl was ordained to the deaconate in 2002 and to the priesthood in 2003.

Olean, New York located 15 minutes from the Pennsylvania border, is a poor rural community, which is heavily Roman Catholic. St. Andrew's was an all-white parish. Cheryl recalls her success in opening the doors, breaking down barriers, and inviting people into relationship with one another. While it was a hard work it was an excellent experience. She recalls feeling that it was also lonely and isolating. She had left behind a number of friends when she made the move to Olean.

After five years she decided to move on and accepted a call to become rector of St. Matthew's Church in Savannah, GA. She arrived on the morning of August 1, 2007. A woman drove up besides her and parked. Initially she thought the woman was there to

welcome her to her new ministry. Instead she produced identification as an IRS agent and served the church with a bill for unpaid taxes. It took the first two years of her ministry to work on settling accounts with the IRS. Her time in Savannah has been a wonderful expression of her ministry and has also made her acutely aware of her New York, northern roots. She is reminded that she's not only a Yankee, but also young at that. There is an underlying tension that there is "nothing worse than a northerner knowing your business." Through it all Cheryl has maintained her composure and her spirit has never wavered in the time I have known her.

She credits this to her role models: The Rev. Sandye Wilson and The Rev. Janice Robinson, whom Cheryl considers one of the most balanced priests that she knows. Cheryl recalls that on a visit to GTS she had the honor of meeting Pauli Murray, whom she didn't immediately recognize. Her support resources are her friends all over the country, and her deanery colleagues.

Her challenges over the years have been the above mentioned loneliness and isolation. She is aware that her mouth sometimes gets her into hot spots. As a woman of African heritage she is aware that while she is listened to, she is also ignored because she is different. She relies heavily on her support group of friends since she is the first woman of African heritage in the Diocese of Georgia. She has chosen to spend this time in Savannah figuring out where to devote her energy, to prioritize goals and objectives and to bring parish programs in line with the budget and outreach endeavors. The joys in her life are just being faithful and finding joy in any situation. She credits herself with being a person of resilience, fidelity and perseverance. She has written a letter to newly

ordained clergy which I have included below, in which passes on some of her sage advice:

Dear Ordinands,

Hello from St. Matthew's, Savannah. I wish you all of the best as you enter this new phase of ministry... "What advice should one share with ordinands you don't know?"

Well, all I can do is share with you some of the things that may be helpful in your ministry, based on my ministry.

On one hand I wished I spent more time as a Deacon. On the other hand I was so thrilled and feared that people would change their mind, so I accepted the date!

Do have a more intentional prayer life. Memorize as many prayers as possible. I've had to stumble into discipline.

Do realize the loneliness and isolation of ministry. This is true single or married. You may find that you are left out in the cold, directionless even though the canons say that you are to have a mentor. No matter, find your own mentors, even if they are in books.

Do read A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations: Building an Excellent Match Upon Your Shared Strengths (A Jossey Bass title) by Kennon L. Callahan and the *Manual of Business Practices (from 815)* before taking that parish.

Do know that really and truly, a church system cannot handle more than 20% change at a time. Really.

I wish that the clergy adage "Be careful of the first people who become your fast friends in a Church" were not true, but it was for me.

Be careful in contract negotiations. Forget the Diocese, compare your contract with your seminary colleagues, have a lawyer and clergy you trust review things before you sign. Make sure that they give you a cell phone.

Never give out your personal e-mail. Create one right now for church business.

Keep a journal. It will comfort you and prove to be a source of documentation.

May God grant you the grace to pray the Eucharist like it is your first time and your last time, because it is.

Blessings,

Cheryl+⁶⁸

⁶⁸

Sent to author via email October 6, 2009.

The Rev. Mpho Tutu

“God hasn’t wandered off yet”⁶⁹

The Rev. Mpho Tutu was born in London, England, and was educated in England, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland and the United States. Her early life as an Anglican was spent between England and South Africa. She remembers her father Anglican Archbishop Emeritus, Desmond Tutu of Cape Town, teaching in a number of multi-racial and multi-denominational seminaries and universities in South Africa. She remembers that one of the universities was closed by the apartheid government for its mixing of the races. Her early life was one in which she herself mixed with people of all races, while living under the rules of strict segregation of South Africa. She remembers thinking that she was living in a weird context. On the one hand she was living and interacting with people in a diverse community, while on another level trips to see her grandparents threw her into the stark reality of living under an apartheid government.

Since she grew up as a “preacher’s kid”, becoming a priest was not high on her list of possible careers. Most of the time she tried to avoid the call to ordained ministry. She was constantly running in the opposite direction. It was her college chaplain at Howard University, Nat Porter who said to her “you would make a wonderful priest.” She describes it like Jonah going to Nineveh. After leaving Howard she moved to New York City, where she administered her father’s scholarship fund. After her marriage she moved to the Worcester, Massachusetts area. She began attending All Saints Episcopal

⁶⁹ Mpho Tutu, interview by author, September 30, 2009.

Church and became actively involved with the Education for Ministry Program (EFM). Here she realized that she could run no more. She recalls telling herself that there was the possibility that the Diocese of Western Massachusetts could say no and then she could continue on with her life.

Her ordination process was slow to start. The illness and death of her bishop meant that the incoming bishop placed the ordination process on hold. Since the incoming bishop was her former spiritual director, she also had to find new spiritual guidance. The waiting proved to be beneficial, since her father had been diagnosed with prostate cancer, and she wanted to spend time with him.

I met Mpho when we were in the incoming class of 1999 at Episcopal Divinity School. She remembers the seminary experience as a time of entering into a deep conversation with God. She loved EDS because she didn't have to live on campus and she could be present when she knew things deserved her time. This gave her time to be with her husband and daughter. She credits the work of the EDS Anti-Racism commitment and the way its work and foundations still serve in her ministry today. During her third year at seminary she spent a year attending the College of the Transfiguration (COT) in Grahamstown, South Africa. She recalls that being a woman there was an interesting experience. The male seminarians were not quite sure how to relate to a female with family in the ordination process. The other women who attended COT were either single or were there without their husbands. She was the only woman with a husband on campus and the question was continuously asked: "What is your husband going to do?"

After graduation from Episcopal Divinity School, Mpho was accepted as a Clergy Resident in the Lilly Foundation program at Christ Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia. She was ordained a deacon in 2002 and priested in 2003. Christ Church is an historic parish located in Alexandria's Old Town. Mpho describes the parish as "being as white as you can get." She related two stories to me that occurred at the parish. In one incident while with her daughter she was at yelled at in the courtyard by a man who said "That's why we cannot get jobs", which to her implied that a women of African heritage could get a job while a white man could not. In a second incident she noted that the reason she always wore her collar at work was so that she would not have to through the trouble of trying to explain to people who she was. She recalls that the experience was at times isolating. Her saving grace was that she wasn't centered at Christ Church. She had a ministry beyond with her worldwide speaking and preaching engagements.

After the two-year program ended at Christ Church, she began her own non-profit organization, *The Tutu Institute of Prayer and Pilgrimage*, whose mission is "to support and enrich the spiritual journeys by offering opportunities for people to experience the world as recipients of God's loving grace."⁷⁰ She is not quite sure what direction the institute will take in the future. At this time of the writing she is currently on tour with her father promoting *Made for Goodness* a book that they co-authored. Mpho considers herself multi-vocational as a wife, mother and a priest and is figuring out how to integrate it all together. She currently worships at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Washington DC. The parish offers a place where her two daughters have a place to experience God's

⁷⁰ www.tutuinstitute.org

presence through spiritual formation. If that means she doesn't get to serve on the altar, she is comfortable with that decision.

She is keeping centered with a life of prayer life that includes: Morning Prayer, running as a form of meditation, Sunday Eucharist and family prayers with her husband and children. At some point during her day she will always stop and turn her awareness to God's presence. She is supported by her husband, parents and sister clergy.

The advice she has to pass along would be advice that was passed down to her: "If you find a congregation and Bishop that supports you don't move," and "Find other people in the process who will support you, laugh, giggle, cry with you. You will need them now and later."

The Rev. Paula Clark Green

“Be open to God’s call in strange places”⁷¹

Probably the first words uttered by The Rev. Paula Clark Green was “integration.”

A native of Washington D.C., she was born into the Baptist Church. When her parents and others tried to integrate the all-white Baptist church the results were less than favorable. The result was the creation of *The Fellowship of the Free*, which would meet in the basement of St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church. *The Fellowship of the Free* was comprised of black and white parishioners working together on issues of social justice. This seed was planted early in Paula’s life. Paula recalls that she and her sister eventually made it from the basement into the sanctuary. In addition to her parents’ work of social justice, her family was the first family to integrate their street in D.C.

She attended the National Cathedral School.⁷² It was during her time here that The Rev. Jacqueline Means came to speak and she remembers that it had a great impact on her.⁷³ It was while sitting in the National Cathedral at the age of 12-13 that she felt the call to ordained ministry. She feels that her sense of call is still being formed, especially the call to be a parish priest.

After accepted into the process, she chose to attend Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), which by her description was at a “kairos period.” A period that was right and opportune. It was a period when people were openly taking about issues of

⁷¹ Paula Clark Green, interview by author, October 14, 2009.

⁷² National Cathedral School, located in Washington D.C. is an independent day school for girls in grades 4 through 12.

⁷³ The Rev. Jacqueline Means was the first regularly ordained women in the Episcopal Church on January 1, 1977.

race. Paula is interviewed in a book by The Rev. Joseph Constant,⁷⁴ in which she talks about the low number of students of African heritage at VTS when she was attending. She notes that currently the VTS student of color enrollment is roughly 20%.

Her view of the ordination process in the Diocese of Washington D.C. is a positive one. The months of discernment in the parish were beneficial and prayerful in her move towards parish ministry. As she says, she “entered into God’s call, whatever the call was ordained or not.” She still considers her former rector at St. Timothy’s, The Rev. Canon Dalton Downs, as one of her mentors. She has and still relies on his advice and his sound wisdom. Paula was ordained to the priesthood in January 2005.

Paula’s first cure was as an Assistant at St. Patrick’s Episcopal Church in Washington D.C., an all-white parish. The parish’s last member of color, who had long since left the church, was in 1964. She recalls that although the rector and the search committee knew she was African-American, for whatever reason, the parish did not. One parishioner made the statement “You’re Paula Green; you’re an African-American woman.” Still the congregation welcomed and embraced her with open arms. She loved the experience and the opportunity to thrive in the church environment and the St. Patrick’s community. Although the issue of race was present, she was loved for who she was.

Paula has recently been installed at the Rector at St. John’s Episcopal/Anglican Church in Beltsville, Maryland. She is blessed to have her mentor Dalton Downs to serve as Priest Associate. Paula loves being a priest here, and as she says, “is serving the

⁷⁴ He is Director for Racial and Ethnic Ministries and Social Life at Virginia Theological Seminary, and a VTS graduate.

people of God.” The interplay with God’s people on a daily basis is one of the things that shapes and sustains her. She finds her current work in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial parish uplifting.

Paula comments that being an African-American woman gives “us” access in white circles that are seen as non-threatening. However, the challenge appears to be within the African American church. Comments have been made to her that she is a “sell-out” by not working in the Black Church. This has also caused some angst among her Black Episcopal male colleagues. She notes that “many of us are in white parishes because those are the parishes that have offered us jobs.”

A self-described Gen-X’er, Paula preaches out of that context. She recalls serving on a panel with The Rt. Rev. Nathan Baxter,⁷⁵ and noticing that they were both using the words and music of the negro spirituals in combination the words and music of hip-hop. If there was a centering hymn in her life it would be “We Are Marching in the Light of God” sung in all three languages.⁷⁶ She feels that she is called to bring the common expression of God to her congregants and to be part of the wider church. This would include relating to people on many levels. She recalls a funeral that she did which incorporated both Muslim and Episcopal traditions, and a Yoruba naming service and, “ability to bridge different experiences.”

⁷⁵ Bishop Baxter is the 10th Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania. He is also the thirty-ninth Bishop of African heritage consecrated in the Episcopal Church.

⁷⁶ Horace Clarence Boyer, ed. *Lift Every Voice and Sing II: An African American Hymnal* (New York, Church Publishing Incorporated, 1993), #787.

The advice she would pass along to women of African heritage in the ordination process would be: “Remain open to God’s call in strange places, be true to who you are, be honest about your identity and appreciate it, and to never give up your voice.”

The Rev. Dr. Anne-Marie Jeffery

“The church needs your voice”⁷⁷

One of the first things Anne-Marie speaks about is her connection to other ordained women who are an instrumental part of her ministry: Paula Green, Mpho Tutu, Kim Baker and Robyn Franklin-Vaughan.⁷⁸ The daughter of the late Rt. Rev. Alfred Jeffery, her family spans four generations of Anglicans.⁷⁹ Not surprisingly her early memories of church focus on the requirement of having to be there, and that the services were long and boring. In the midst of all this she recalls being fascinated with the Eucharist and could not wait to be confirmed. Growing up Anglican, many of the girls expressed an interest in serving as an acolyte but were told such participation was reserved for boys only. Anne-Marie petitioned her father, but he would not make an exception.

As a “preacher’s daughter” she had no idea that she was going to be called into ministry. The call came while she was working as a physicist with the national government in Maryland. She had been working with a seminarian in the ordination process at her parish, and while reading through the ordination handbook something within her shook and she remembers feeling a “little off.” It was with “fear and trembling” and an “oh no” that she began the process towards ordination.

⁷⁷ Anne-Marie Jeffery, interview by author, October 17, 2009.

⁷⁸ Rev. Kim Baker serves as Chaplain at the Washington Cathedral School. Rev. Robyn-Franklin Vaughan serves as Chaplain at Howard University.

⁷⁹ The Rt. Rev. Alfred Jeffery served as Anglican Bishop of Antigua.

Soon after she was accepted into the process in the Diocese of Washington D.C., she attended Virginia Theological Seminary. Although describing the experience, curriculum and instruction as enriching, she said, “I have never been more aware of being black in my life.” She saw first hand just how white the Episcopal church really was and how blind the church could be to issues of racism. It was as a student at VTS that she became and still remains close friends with Paula Green. She was ordained to the priesthood in 2004.

Her first position was as an Assistant/Urban Missioner at Church of the Epiphany which is located in downtown Washington D.C., a racially mixed parish with a commitment to issues of social and economic justice. At Epiphany in 2004 that Anne-Marie started Street Church, a worshipping community for the homeless.⁸⁰ Street Church is located three blocks from the White House in Franklin Square Park. It provides the homeless with a place to worship, share community, connect, and get something to eat. Anne-Marie says of her work with Street Church: “When you’re homeless, I think that people are always chasing you away. They are not looking at you. If you go and sit next to [a homeless person], they’ll start talking. You’re sitting together; you’re eating the same thing. People are willing to let you sit with them and join with them, usually.”⁸¹ She credits her parish with presenting her with some wonderful ministerial experiences. However, she knew that she would have to leave in order to live more fully into her ordained ministry.

⁸⁰ Street Church was inspired by the Boston-based program Ecclesia Ministries.

⁸¹ *Episcopal Life Archive* “Worship without Walls” by Lucy Chumbley, October 1, 2006. (accessed November 26, 2009).

Currently she is wearing three hats: serving as Priest in Charge of St. James's Church in Bowie, MD, being co-leader in the proposed merger of two area parishes, St. James's and St. George's, and serving as the Episcopal Chaplain at Bowie State University.

St. James's has been hit hard in this recession, which has tightened parishioners' pockets and diminished the value of the church's endowment. The proposed merger has been difficult but is seen as "the only viable option for the survival of St. James's", the smaller parish with just 38 parishioners.⁸² The proposed merger melds together a white parish (St. James's), and a parish that is described as an "eclectic, quirky, and collective of straight and gay men and women of various races" (St. George's). Anne-Marie and the Rev. Connie Reinhardt (rector of St. George's) are both focused on helping their parishioners learn all they can from each other and adjust to the challenges that may lay ahead. It is a lot of effort, but Anne-Marie says she feels "closer to her call."

With all that on her plate as the leader of a start-up church and a start-up chaplaincy, she has had to learn to make intentional time for herself for prayer, spiritual direction and being with friends. She has been sustained in her faith journey by some wonderful mentors. She credits The Rev. Dr. Margaret McNaughton Ayers, Associate Dean for Community Life, Ethnic Ministries and Admissions at Virginia Theological Seminary who has been a wonderful presence in her life, and Rev. Karla Woggon, Rector of Ascension Episcopal Church in Hickory, NC.

⁸² The other parish is St. George's has an average Sunday attendance of 70.

Her passions for her ministry are preaching and liturgy. She is blessed to be given the opportunity at St. James's to look at language in liturgy and to lead workshops and educational opportunities for people of all ages.

Her views and observations of being a woman of color serving in white parishes run a wide gamut. She says, “As women of color we are loved more by a white congregation.” She notes that the racial pecking order for a black congregation calling a new priest is: black men, white man, white woman and then black women. Like many of her contemporaries, the support comes from other women in similar positions: “There are not too many of us, so we are easy to find, but we are determined and special.” The advice she has to pass along is that “the black churches will not want you, do not be surprised.” Still “We have a lot to offer the church, the church needs our voice.”

In this chapter it has been an honor to journey with my clergy sisters. While our lives have taken a variety of paths to get to this point, we come together in a supportive sisterhood much like the trailblazers who have gone before us. The concluding chapter takes a look at the threads that bind us together and ways that the church can expand the Reign of God in parish leadership.

Chapter III

Threads: A Conclusion in Progress

“I...am not contain’d
between my hat and my boots”

Walt Whitman.⁸³

“Hidden in Plain View: African American Episcopal Women’s Histories”, is the title of a paper presented by Dr. Fredrica Harris Thompsett in 2004.⁸⁴ She speaks to the stories of African American women as being in plain sight. Quilts were a means of communication between abolitionist and slaves in 19th century America. They were hung in conspicuous places along the Underground Railroad and contained imbedded messages. These quilts and their patterns gave directions to the next stop, the safe places towards freedom. These first ordained women of African heritage have been making spiritual and pastoral quilts for other ordained women of African heritage to follow. Sometimes these directions were hidden in plain view for those of us who were to follow in ordained leadership. In this section are a number of quotes that represent a composite portrait of the women whom I have interviewed, although they are not identified by name.

⁸³ Walt Whitman as cited in Pauli Murray, *Dark Testament and other Poems*, (CT, Silvermine 1970) 49.

⁸⁴ Dr. Fredrica Harris Thompsett, “Hidden in Plain View: African America Episcopal Women’s Histories,” (lecture, Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, VA, February 24, 2005)

“Though black Episcopalians fully share the traditions and the liturgy of the Episcopal Church, we bring to that heritage a very different social history.”⁸⁵ The writer of this quote, Marjorie Nichols Farmer, maintains that the story of Episcopal women of African heritages begins in Philadelphia at the historic St. Thomas’ Church where in 1974 eleven women were irregularly ordained to the priesthood.

I disagree, however with Farmer’s timeline. The stories of women of African heritage in TEC were formed long before Philadelphia. I know personally, as an African American woman that I can go back generations to the stories of witness from my mother, grandmothers, aunts, the Mama Knox’s and Mama Johnson’s. Their priestly presence has a profound influence in my life.

With Pauli Murray being ordained in January of 1977, and the last of us in this study being ordained in 2003, we have 28 years of sacred stories to share and many threads that have passed through each generation. In this analysis of threads I am cognizant of the missing middle generation of women of African heritage which would include the years 1986 – 1996. I am operating under the assumption that the threads that tie the first generation and third generations may bind the middle group as well.

All the women interviewed here, with the exception of one, have been raised in the black church, either the Anglican/Episcopal Church or in the Baptist church. Church provided us all a stable and loving community. In many instances parents, especially mothers were involved in lay ministry in the parish. Parish life was the center and the

⁸⁵ Farmer in Prelinger, “Episcopal Woman”, 222.

core of our communities and educated many young girls like ourselves in the issues of social and economic justice.

What we all have maintained is the ability to find connections with other women wherever our calls take us. The deep bonds of friendship formed at General Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary between Ann Holmes Redding, Sandye Wilson, Nan Peete and Kelly Brown Douglas are still in place today. New York City provided the first women with some life-long mentors during the late 1970's to mid 1980's, among them, Bishop Walter Dennis, Bishop Paul Moore, Bishop Herbert Donovan, Rev. Canon Frederick Boyd Williams and Bishop Frank Turner. In Philadelphia it was Rev. Paul Washington, in Boston, Bishops John Coburn and John Burgess, Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman and Rev. Canon Ed Rodman. Other supporters include: Rev. Canon Kwasi Thornell, Rev. Canon Harold Lewis, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Bishop Henry Mason, Rev. Henri Steines, and Rev. Lloyd Casson. Many of the men listed above have also served as allies along the way. These allies were male and female, lay and ordained; black and white. They were not afraid to speak truth to power. They spoke up, whether the situation was as small as being followed as a potential shoplifter in a local grocery store or as large as receiving death threats.

It is not surprising that the early women experienced struggles in their ordination process. Both black and white clergy and the laity were at times less than supportive, often verbally expressing their displeasure with both women seminarians and priests. These women found creative ways to find supportive havens within their communities,

whether that community was found at a seminary, with a supportive rector, a supportive instructor, or just when the presence of the Holy Spirit was especially needed.

For all the support that this group of women has gained over the years, we have all lost friends as a result of our being ordained or marrying out of our race, as a result of elevation in pastoral status to the level of Bishop or Canon, or working in all-white parish settings. Two common denominators that span generations are the foundational and historic ministries of Pauli Murray and Barbara Harris. Mary Adebonojo, Barbara Harris, Sandye Wilson and Gayle Harris were fortunate enough to have Pauli attend their ordinations, and for the remainder of the women it is an honor to be acquainted with her posthumously.

Unlike some of our brothers of African heritage, who knew from an early age that they were called to the priesthood, we tended to run fast and hard from our call until it spoke to us in some unlikely places. And in some instances, when the message was so clear, we continued to ignore that which we were called by God to do. Our employment histories prior to entering the ordination process included: professor, executive, historic preservationist, physicist and fundraiser. Our talents and experiences strengthened all of us women in our ordained ministries.

Experiences of racism, classism, sexism and internalized oppression have deeply impacted our lives as priests. Some of us have seen the “ism’s” in the parishes we have been called to or placed in. As one of the women said of bishops and deployment officers, “we are sometimes called and assigned to be in charge of places that they never would put a white person in.” Another woman was told by a former white parishioner

that “the church was fine until the niggers came in.” Another was told by a black lay male, “black women priests would deprive the black male priests from all the good jobs.” Some of these woman have had their offices searched, tires slashed, mail stolen, petitions for their removal circulated, received hate mail, been yelled at for their color, lived in rat and roach infested clergy housing, and yet through these experiences they have seldom wavered in the call to ministry. Women have continued to break through the barriers that have been placed in front of us with grace, dignity, and as one priest said, “a sense of fashion and style.”

While some of our male priests of African heritage have been our rock and salvation, relationships between male and female clergy continue to be strained at times. Some black male clergy find that women called to serve white parishes are “selling out.” Yet, “Many of us are in white parishes” because “those are the parishes that offer us the jobs”, one woman exclaimed. “Very interesting, I haven’t quite figured out the dynamics between us yet” was a phrase used to describe the relationships between male and female clergy of African heritage. Some women feel that they [the men] don’t know what to do with them. One woman was disappointed that more women were not serving in the black church. She believes that women are called to serve the black church. It was generally expressed that all of women of African heritage need to continue to be in mutual conversation and discernment to work side by side with male clergy of African heritage.

All the women interviewed find support in hymns of praise. Hymns serve as a continuous way of prayer. Knowing the words and music by heart, we sing loudly and proudly. We move, we sway and we clap on the less dominant beat of 2 and 4. We sing

at the altar, we sing with each other, we sing by ourselves, we sing off key, and in perfect harmony, but we sing. And if by some chance we cannot remember the words, we certainly remember the tune. Hymns of praise are like melodious prayers that can be sung ever so quietly anywhere and everywhere. The words to hymns are prayers of comfort in difficult, as well as in good times. One only needs to attend the consecration of a bishop, the installation of a rector, a funeral, or choir practice to know the importance of music in our lives. Hymns serve as a foundational source for our preaching. In some ways this music connects one back to loved ones and ancestors and by the same token bring the joy of hope, expectation and anticipation.

As the first African American woman ordained in the Episcopal Church, Pauli Murray's life and work was rooted in the feminist movement. For Pauli, the feminist theological movement and the movement of black theologies spoke to a need for humanization and an understanding of the oppressed as subjects of history with whom God identifies. Although she believed that they were both vital movements towards religious and social betterment, she felt that neither spoke to the experiences of African American women who suffered because of their race, gender and class. While Pauli was on the cutting edge of both the feminist and womanist movements, none of the women interviewed related any of their particular work as being under the umbrella of "womanist theology."

Although the word “womanist” was not mentioned in any of my interviews, I believe that these women do follow the elements of womanist theological methodology as articulated by the author Delores Williams.⁸⁶

1) The female clergy of African heritage are change agents. Women have been change agents regarding issues of social or political nature. They have been committed to the care and nurturing of people inside or out of their religious communities. Female clerical work has been to the care of the least, lost and the last which includes; feeding and providing spiritual nourishment to the poor and homeless. For all of the women interviewed ministry has always gone beyond the doors of the church and into making disciples in the community and beyond.

2) The clergy women of African heritage are informed by liturgy. The love of liturgy allows a new awareness to the thought, worship and actions of both the black and white church. As mentioned above, it is not only the hymns of praise that inform our core being but also the incorporation of new forms of worship. The center of ministry is always in the celebration of the Eucharist. The women interviewed have been creative in the worship offerings to their communities. There have been candlelight compline services led by youth groups, an outdoor church for the homeless, Saturday seeker services, gospel Sunday services and intentional services to meet the youth where they are by incorporating contemporary music. The women surveyed have been creative in their worship offerings but have stayed away from the new contemporary canned services

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Delores Williams, *The Womanist Reader*, ed. Layli Phillips (New York, Routledge, 2006), 121.

of U2charist and the Hip-Hop Mass.⁸⁷ Lectionary based sermons also provide a time to reflect upon stories of injustice, racism, interpretation of world news events, and the heartfelt movement of the spirit working in one's life. One priest used the theme song from the Broadway play "Rent" to begin a sermon addressing the question of how does one spend their daily life and work as Christians in the world. Another woman used a personal encounter with a woman raising 17 children whose parents had died of AIDS, yet another has preached widely about the full and total inclusion of gays and lesbians into the episcopate of the Church.

3) The clergy woman of African heritage has a gift for teaching. Since their interpretations of scripture are through the eyes of women of African heritage, they tend to encourage and nurture others to interpret scripture through their own lenses as well. All the women emphasize, "Be yourself, and be authentic." There was an importance of always remembering the order of life priorities, one is prayer life, one is family, and one is ministry. All the women believe that all people have gifts and one of the clergy's responsibilities is to encourage people to find their gifts and to celebrate them, whether they are found within the walls of the church or outside in the world. I heard it expressed more than once that "we are daughters of Hagar."⁸⁸ They have all been involved in bringing young people into the church and providing a foundation and the language for them to live out the gospel.

⁸⁷ U2charist uses the songs of the music group U2 in lieu of hymns. The Hip-Hop Mass, created by The Rev. Timothy Holder, Bronx, New York, uses the rhyme and poetry of MC's, rappers, gospel and soul music as an outreach to children and young people.

⁸⁸ Hagar was known as a model of power, skill, strength and drive. Genesis, chapters 16 and 21.

4) The clergy women of African heritage have commitment to imagery and cultural language. Woman of African heritage are a people of stories. As stories have been passed down in their lives from generation to generation, they too have their stories to pass to those we serve, as well as those women of African heritage who are following in the ordination process. All of them came of age where the dominant image of God was Father and Jesus, Joseph, Mary and the angels were Caucasian. Yet, they have always had their own image of God, Jesus, the Holy Family and angels. I recall my father telling me at an early age that “Jesus couldn’t possibly have blond hair and blue eyes, not coming from that region of the world.” The angels were family members who had passed, who still held a place of reverence, and a source of eternal wisdom. They have not only created our own images, but are comfortable enough to express these images with others. Whether they knew it at the time of our call, ordination or our work in ministry, we all feel the connectivity with our sisters, lay and ordained, living or deceased.

It has been said that those things which bind us together are stronger than those that tear us apart. Female clergy of African heritage continue to work their contemporary quilts which are hidden in plain sight.

In the course of writing this thesis I have developed a deep and abiding personal connection and empathy with other ordained women of African heritage in TEC. Their linkages, their connections – at times acknowledged, sometimes not – connect these women, myself included, across time and space.

Storytelling has always been an important part of the upbringing of women of African heritage. Through storytelling, questions were answered, history was conveyed, and lifelong lessons were taught and processed. I have heard it said that when an elder passes on, it's as if a library has burned.

I have attempted to share stories about some of the first eleven African-American women ordained in TEC, as well as stories of some of my contemporaries in ministry. I hope that this body of work will serve to supplement the educational teachings about ordained women's transforming leadership and power. The questions and scenarios found in the appendix are intended to broaden the scope of the work of deployment officers, search committees, parishes and consultants.

Why are the stories important and what place do they have in the history of TEC? These stories provide another level of context to examine in the church. TEC church is a place full of possibilities, chaos, creativity and conflict. It is a place where harmony and conflict co-exist. It's a place that transcends and defies dualism, where rigid linear reality cannot exist and a place where multiculturalism and diverse identities mix and mingle in a constant ebb and flow of prayer, mess, mediation and mitigation. In other words: God is calling all people into the beloved community.

With the exception of Pauli Murray, the remaining ten women in the first generation of priests are alive and in good health. They recall their stories like it was yesterday, and are still active in the church. I wanted to hear their stories. I wanted to hear their experiences first hand. I wanted to share in the community of women, both lay and ordained, who persevered so that I could become a priest. The same interest to know

the story of the Philadelphia eleven expanded my desire to know about the first eleven ordained African-American women, five of whom I interviewed for this project.

My contemporaries attended a number of different seminaries. Sometimes we were brought together at an OBES (Organization of Black Episcopal Seminarians) Conference. For the most part we were brought together by word of mouth, to find community where none had previously existed. We were branching out into white suburban and rural parishes. We found that we needed to “find” each other for mutual care and support. The mentoring process with both black and white allies was a critical and key component to our work in parishes. We also realized that we were sometimes an enigma in our dioceses, with deployment officers, search committees and bishops alike not knowing quite what to do with us in terms of deployment.

As far as I am aware, this thesis is the first compilation of the stories from a selection of the first African-American women ordained in the Episcopal Church. It was through conversations and ordination dates that I was able to compile the list. It would be a rich addition to the curriculum of Episcopal Church history if their stories were included and made part of the national church archives. Present curriculum material provides supplemental information on Native Americans, women’s history, and African American history mostly from the male perspective.

Likewise, the women of African heritage who are entering, or are now in the ordination process, could benefit from the stories and experiences of all these women. We are at a very pivotal time in our church in regards to the changing models of parish ministry. Bi-vocational appears to be the new deployment word. If these women are

informed about our experiences in parish ministry, this better equips them with the questions to ask and perhaps some pitfalls to avoid when working with the diocesan deployment officers, search committees and bishops.

Allies, black and white, male and female, have provided and are still providing a crucial ministerial support to all of the women. These allies function as sounding boards and wise counsel, listening and offering sound advice. They see the ministry of women of African heritage on a broad scale. They have spoken and continue to boldly speak to issues of racial, social and economic justice. Mentors have proven to be invaluable guides along these women's spiritual journeys.

Until last year the Office of Black Ministries held no track for clergy working outside of black parishes. Many of women did not attend the conferences as there was nothing on the agenda that addressed serving in all-white or predominately white parishes. Group discussions, a space for active listening, will enhance and broaden the oral stories so that will create a space for shared experiences and follow God's call for to be in covenant relationship with each other. In addition, we can further deepen this discussion to include God's call to each of us to live out our baptismal covenant in all communities.

In the appendix readers will find questions and scenarios for group work, that seek to integrate the stories with motives for examining the ordained leadership of women of African heritage. They are written with bishops, deployment officers, parishes, search committees and consultants in mind. I have used female clergy of

African heritage as a reference point, but the material can be faithfully adapted to looking at the ministry of other ethnic groups.

When church leaders are able to look at the search process through different lenses, I believe it will broaden their search criteria when looking at potential applicants for clergy positions.

Appendix

Working with the Stories of Women of African Heritage in Broadening the Call to Ordained Leadership

In group work I always believe that there are group norms that ground and center people. The group should feel free to tailor or add as required. I would suggest that the group opens every session with prayer for God's guidance in the work they will be engaged in.

Suggested Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Differences:

The Sharing of Yourself:

- Try on.
- It's okay to disagree. It's not okay to shame, blame, or attack oneself or others.
- Practice self focus.
- Practice "both/and" thinking.
- Beware of intent and impact.
- Take 100 percent responsibility for one's own learning.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- It's okay to be messy.
- Say ouch.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, Virginia, The Alban Institute, 2008), 4. These guidelines were originally written by Visions, Inc.

Listen to Others:

- Hold each speaker's words as sacred.
- Listen with an understanding and open heart, acceptance and support of the speaker.
- Allow persons to draw their own conclusions from their word without offering analysis, probing, judgment, or an attempt to "fix" them.
- Allow each person to do his or her own work and be supportive of each person's personal journey.
- Stretch to really listen to others, for those things said and those things left unsaid.
- Honor each person by giving your full attention.

It is only in the giving of time and space for the sharing of stories, fears and concerns that we will move into including the names of women of African heritage on the table for deployment in the church.

Some Suggested Questions for Bishops and Deployment Officers.

- How many women of African Heritage have been called through a search process to be the lead pastor? Looking at the stories you have read how can bishops, and deployment officers be more supportive of the call to ordained leadership either in a parish or on the Diocesan staff?

- How many women of African Heritage have appointed by the local bishop to serve as priest-in-charge, interims or in other capacities?
- Based on the stories you have read what are some of the barriers in issues of deployment facing women of African heritage in your diocese today?
- How can we as leaders in the church read and share these stories as a part of our Episcopal history?

Some Suggested Questions and Exercises for Small Group Work

(lay and ordained)

- Read Acts 2:43-47

Reflecting on the passage consider the following questions.

- * What is the reality of the existence of such a community today?
 - * How does this picture of the early church influence what we are called to be as the church today?
 - * What would it take to move our parish families toward it?
- As reflected in the stories you have read, what does the “Good News” that Jesus brings mean to you?

Scenario One: Lifelines

Materials Needed: colored markers, pencils, large newsprint and masking tape.

When we take a look at the Gospel of Mark we are immediately drawn into Jesus' journey. Rooted in an oral tradition the Gospel moves smoothly; it is almost as if you are sitting at the feet of a consummate storyteller.

In the lifelines exercise, you will draw something of your journey, both from the external perspective of what happened and from a spiritual perspective, the inner meaning of your journey. You can define "spiritual" in any way that you like. You will then be given an opportunity to explain your journey, your lifeline, with your group.

Drawing your external and spiritual lifeline is an excellent way to begin to think about how your story connects with Mark's story, and how you can bring your experiences face-to-face with the divine events in the life of Jesus and better open yourself. Your times in desert places, on high plateaus, in dark valleys, along winding roads, or on the mountain top all resonate with the story Mark tells.

With a marker on the large newsprint chronologically chart those points in your life that mark the hills and valleys of your life. If you were increasingly happy as a child, you might draw a gradually ascending hill. If adolescence was an especially difficult time, you would draw a rather steep descent once the peak of the hill was reached. If your twenties were good years but calm, you might want to draw a plateau: if turbulent, you could indicate this by jagged peaks and valleys. Continue

this until you have drawn the place where you are now. Then with a pencil label each of the most significant events and turning points in your life.

Now with a different color marker, beginning at the same place, draw your spiritual lifeline. Define spiritual any way that you would like. For example: the power of the church community in your life, your relationship with the Lord, your appreciation with the sacraments and/or Scripture, your encounter with God. With your pencil label the significant spiritual events in your life.

Each person shares their lifeline; you do not have to explain what everything means.

Rationale: Like the Gospel of Mark and the stories we have read, we get to the current place in both our physical and spiritual lives through a process. We are often called to serve the church knowing very little of the people with whom we are to make important decisions. This connects everyone through the use of their own personal stories. How can you also connect the stories you have read with your own personal journey?

Scenario Two: Community in the Book of Acts

Materials needed: comfortable surroundings and candles.

Luke was the author not only of the Third Gospel; he was also the author of the Book of Acts, which picks up where the Gospel narrative ends. Luke says that Jesus began his ministry in the power of the Spirit. Luke begins Acts by showing that the same Spirit that dwelt in Jesus as an individual now comes to indwell the church that

God calls into being. The Holy Spirit comes in a powerful way. Like a mighty wind, to fill people gathered at Jerusalem for Pentecost.

We quickly learn that the special work of the Holy Spirit is to unify. God, the Father/Mother creates and gives the law; God the Son redeems the fallen creation showing the way, God the Holy Spirit unifies, brings together, and makes community. The sudden feeling of union that descends upon old and new followers of Jesus on Pentecost is so strong that Luke describes the experience this way, (read Acts 2:1-4).

In the Christian view, the Church, with all of its failings, is not just a bunch of people who come together to worship God; it is rather a community empowered by the mighty Spirit of God, the Mighty Wind of God. When we are being that church we feel that power; it is strong enough to transform lives, strong enough to raise up the weak, save the lost. Strong enough to help us fight effectively against racism, and for social and economic justice.

Questions: How are we called after reading these stories to act as change agents for full inclusion in TEC? Where are some of the places where you can clearly see the work of the Holy Spirit moving through the lives of these women?

Questions for Interviews
First African American women ordained in the Episcopal Church

- Where were you born?
- What was your religious upbringing?
- What are the experiences that informed your early life?
- How did you receive that “call to ordination”?
- What is your sense of call now and how was that formed?
- What was your seminary and how was the experience as an African American woman?
- When you ordained and what was your view of your process?
- What one or two persons were your mentors and/or foremost in their journey to ordained leadership?
- What was your first cure/job, how was that experience seen through thru the lenses of an African American woman?
- Parish life vs. non-parish life? Climate and decision (if applicable)?
- What are/have you involved in, in parish and community?
- What was it like being part of the first eleven African American women ordained in the Episcopal Church?
- What have been your greatest challenges and your greatest joys?
- What experiences are unique in the TEC to African American women/challenges?
- What have been your experiences with your Diocese of ordination and your Diocese of present/past?

- How do you do church, as an African American woman?
- What are your spiritual practices that keep you centered?
- What are/ have been your support resources?
- Experience in the wider church?
- Experiences of racism, sexism, and other “isms” you have faced?
- Experience in the Black Church?
- Experience in the White Church /wider Church?
- What information, advice etc would you like to pass on to women of African descent in ministry now?
- What about your pastoral relationships with male clergy of African heritage?
- Is there a question that you wish I would have asked?

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